

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark green color, framing the central text.

GUZ 15 Ezra

*Bible Commentary:
David Guzik TEV - XV*

David Guzik

David Guziks' Commentary On
15 Ezra
Biblical Text – TEV (Good News Bible)

The Proclamation of Cyrus

Ezr 1:1 In the first year that Cyrus of Persia was emperor, the LORD made what he had said through the prophet Jeremiah come true. He prompted Cyrus to issue the following command and send it out in writing to be read aloud everywhere in his empire:

Ezr 1:2 "This is the command of Cyrus, Emperor of Persia. The LORD, the God of Heaven, has made me ruler over the whole world and has given me the responsibility of building a temple for him in Jerusalem in Judah.

Ezr 1:3 May God be with all of you who are his people. You are to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is worshiped in Jerusalem.

Ezr 1:4 If any of his people in exile need help to return, their neighbors are to give them this help. They are to provide them with silver and gold, supplies and pack animals, as well as offerings to present in the Temple of God in Jerusalem."

Ezr 1:5 Then the heads of the clans of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the priests and Levites, and everyone else whose heart God had moved got ready to go and rebuild the LORD's Temple in Jerusalem.

Ezr 1:6 All their neighbors helped them by giving them many things: silver utensils, gold, supplies, pack animals, other valuables, and offerings for the Temple.

Ezr 1:7 Emperor Cyrus gave them back the bowls and cups that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem and had put in the temple of his gods.

Ezr 1:8 He handed them over to Mithredath, chief of the royal treasury, who made an inventory of them for Sheshbazzar, the governor of Judah,

Ezr 1:9 (9-10) as follows:

- gold bowls for offerings - 30
- silver bowls for offerings - 1,000
- other bowls - 29
- small gold bowls - 30
- small silver bowls - 410
- other utensils - 1,000

Ezr 1:11 In all there were 5,400 gold and silver bowls and other articles which Sheshbazzar took with him when he and the other exiles went from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:1-11

Ezra 1 - Cyrus Allows the Exiles to Return

A. The decree of Cyrus the Persian.

1. (1) God stirs Cyrus to make a decree.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying,

a. **Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia:** God gave the Persian king a sense of urgency about this, and the relief from exile was granted the very **first year** of his reign as **the LORD stirred up** his **spirit**.

i. Cyrus made a decree giving the Jewish exiles in his empire the right to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple in 538 b.c. (Ezr 1:1-4 and Ezr 5:13-17). "The greater part of this book, though it bears the name of Ezra, tells of the pioneers who came back

from exile to Jerusalem a whole lifetime before him. We shall not meet Ezra till chapter 7." (Kidner)

ii. It is quite possible that the Prophet Daniel was instrumental in this stirring of Cyrus. He may have showed the king the prophecies of Jer 25:8-13 and Jer 29:10-14, which refer to the punishment of Babylon and the end of Israel's exile. And if he showed Cyrus such prophecies, he almost certainly would have included Isa 44:28 to Isa 45:5, which mentions Cyrus by name some 150 years before he was born.

iii. "Josephus accounts for his partiality to the Jews from this circumstance; that he was shown the places in Isaiah the prophet where he is mentioned by name, and his exploits and conquests foretold." (Clarke)

iv. "We know that Persian kings paid close heed to prophecies: Cambyses to Egyptian oracles, Darius and Xerxes to Greek oracles (*Herodotus* 8.133; 9.42, 151)." (Yamauchi)

vi. "The difference between 'sacred' and 'profane' history is not that one is under His direct control, and the other is not. What was true of Cyrus and his policy is as true of England. Would that politicians and all men recognized the fact as clearly as this historian did!" (Maclaren)

b. **And also put it in writing:** This writing was also recorded in 2Ch 36:22-23 but existed in contemporary documents that have been discovered by archaeologists.

i. "Cyrus's policy of cooperating with local religions and of encouraging the return of exiles has received explicit archaeological confirmation from the

inscriptions of the king himself (cf. especially the famous 'Cyrus Cylinder')." (Payne)

2. (2-4) *The decree Cyrus made.*

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which *is* in Judah. Who *is* among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He *is* God), which *is* in Jerusalem. And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem.

a. **All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me:** This remarkable recognition of God's hand upon his life may be connected with the remarkable prophecies regarding Cyrus in Isa 44:28 to Isa 45:4.

i. Yet it was also according to the general policy of the Persians. "A notable feature of the Persian empire was its integration of a great diversity of peoples into a single administrative system, while maintaining at the same time a tradition of respect for their local customs and beliefs... they were encouraged to seek the king's welfare by observing the proper forms of their own religions" (Kidner).

ii. "The so-called Cyrus Cylinder, from which the following is an extract, gives his own account of this: 'I return to these sacred cities..., the sanctuaries of which have been in ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their

(former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations... May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me...; to Marduk, my lord, may they say this: 'Cyrus, the king who worships you, and Cambyses, his son...'" (Kidner)

b. He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem: The command of Cyrus not only allowed the return of the exiled people, but also a rebuilding of the destroyed temple.

i. "'To build him a house' is a deliberate echo of the central promise of the Davidic covenant (*cf.* 1Ch 17:11-12; 1Ch 22:10; 1Ch 28:6; 2Ch 6:9-10). Cyrus of course is thinking only of the house in *Jerusalem*, but in the Chronicler's thought this phrase is inevitably connected with both houses of the Davidic covenant, the dynasty as well as the temple." (Selman)

c. Who is among you of all His people? May the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem: The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles end with this wonderful and remarkable encouragement to return and rebuild Jerusalem. This was the necessary and helpful encouragement to the first readers of Chronicles, letting them see their connection with God's broader plan of the ages.

i. Sadly, only a small percentage decided to return from exile; but those who did needed the encouragement to know they were making a valuable contribution to God's work. In passages such as Isa 10:22, God promised that a remnant would return from exile - and *only* a remnant.

ii. "After the deportations only the poor of the land - the vine-growers and farmers - were left (2Ki 25:12;

Jer 39:10; Jer 40:7; Jer 52:16). They occupied the vacant lands (Jer 6:12). A few refugees who fled to different areas drifted back (Jer 40:11-12). For the next fifty years those left behind eked out a precarious existence under the Babylonian yoke (Lam 5:2-5), subjected to ill treatment and forced labor (Lam 5:11-13).” (Yamauchi)

d. **Besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem:** This introduces a central theme for the Book of Ezra - the rebuilding of the temple. Beginning with the decree of Cyrus, the intention was not merely to return and reoccupy Jerusalem but to also rebuild the temple.

i. “Thus we see from the first that the idea which characterizes the restoration is religious. The exiles return as a Church. The goal of their pilgrimage is a holy site. The one work they are to aim at achieving is to further the worship of their God.” (Adeney)

B. The response of the people to the invitation to go back to Jerusalem.

1. (5-6) *Those returning to Jerusalem are encouraged.*

Then the heads of the fathers’ houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem. And all those who *were* around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all *that* was willingly offered.

a. **With all whose spirits God had moved:** Though the returning exiles were a minority, they were a spirit-stirred minority. They were dedicated to the difficult and discouraging task of returning to a ruined city and once

there to **build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.**

i. It was essential that God *move* the spirits of these returning exiles, because they faced many difficulties.

- The journey itself was long, dangerous, and expensive.
- They returned to a city in ruins with no proper homes, roads, or city institutions.
- They didn't have all the material resources they needed.
- They didn't all return to Jerusalem but spread out over the province of Judea.
- They had many enemies.
- Their land was actually the possession of another empire.

ii. "*The chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin; and with them some of the other tribes, as appears from 1Ch 9:3; but these only are named, because they were most considerable for number and quality.*" (Poole)

b. Arose to go up and build the house of the LORD:

So, a good number of the descendants of those exiled some two generations before decided to return to their ancestral land. These went; substantially more stayed behind in the land of their exile.

c. And all those who were around them encouraged them:

This encouragement was more than verbal; it was tangible encouragement of financial and practical backing for the work. We can imagine that many of those who decided to stay in their lands of exile still were happy that others were going to **build the house of the LORD** and wanted to support that work.

i. "An important difference between the deportations by the Babylonians and by the Assyrians is that the Babylonians did not replace the deportees with pagan newcomers. Thus Judah, though devastated, was not contaminated with polytheism to the same degree as Israel." (Yamauchi)

ii. Yamauchi mentions a cave inscription from this period, found at Khirbet Beit Lei, five miles east of Lachish. The inscription reads, "I am Yahweh thy God: I will accept the cities of Judah and will redeem Jerusalem." It has been suggested that this may reflect the mind of a returning exile, expressing his trust in God's faithfulness to restore despite the desolation of Jerusalem.

2. (7-11) The return of the articles of the house of the LORD.

King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. This *is* the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar *kind*, and one thousand other articles. All the articles of gold and silver *were* five thousand four hundred. All *these* Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.

a. **King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the LORD:** When Jerusalem was conquered the remaining treasures of the temple were taken to Babylon (

2Ch 36:18). Now, after conquering the Babylonians, Cyrus adopted a much more generous policy towards their subject peoples, including the Jewish people.

i. “*Objection*. These are said to have been *cut in pieces*, 2Ki 24:13; how then are the here returned? *Answer*. That Hebrew word used 2Ki 24:13, signifies not so properly *to cut in pieces* as to *cut off*, as from the use of the word, Deu 25:12; 2Sa 4:12; 2Ki 18:16; Jer 9:26. And these vessels, when they were taken away from it, because they had for so long been so constantly, and as it were inseparably, united to it, and kept in it.” (Poole)

b. **Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah**: This man was an important leader of this first part of the resettlement of Judah. Some believe that he was a partner to Zerubbabel (Ezr 2:2; Ezr 3:2), and others believe that these were simply two names for the same person.

i. “There is a view that Sheshbazzar was a second name for Zerubbabel, used in all transactions with the ruling power... Alternatively Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel may have been, respectively, the official and unofficial leaders of the enterprise. Neither view is without its difficulties.” (Kidner)

ii. “This was probably the Chaldean name of him who was originally called Zerubbabel: the former signifies *joy in affliction*; the latter, *a stranger in Babylon*. The latter may be designed to refer to his captive state; the former to the prospect of release.” (Clarke)

c. **This is the number of them**: The careful reckoning of the returned articles shows how valued they were and how carefully they were treated.

i. What is conspicuously *missing* from the list is any mention of the more significant articles of the temple

- the altar of incense, the table of showbread, the brazen altar, the golden lampstand, and especially the ark of the covenant. These articles were presumably lost to history at the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians.

ii. "The businesslike transfer of articles, 'counted out' from one custodian to another, may have been outwardly undramatic, but it was momentous. The closing words of the chapter, *from Babylonia to Jerusalem*, mark one of the turning points of history." (Kidner)

iii. "We might have expected some kind of production of the enthusiasm of the returning exiles, some account of how they were sent on their journey, something which we should have felt worthier of the occasion than a list of bowls and nine-and-twenty knives... The list here indicates the pride and joy with which the long hidden and often desecrated vessels were received." (Maclaren)

iv. "Had they not been things of great price and use, they would not have been numbered... Men use not count how many pebbles they have in their yard, or piles of grass in their field, as they do how many pence in their purse or sheep in their fold." (Trapp)

v. "They show that the generosity of Cyrus in restoring so great a hoard was genuine and considerable. It might have been urged that after the treasures had been lying for two generations in a heathen temple the original owners had lost all claim upon them. It might have been said that they had been contaminated by this long residence among the abominations of Babylonian idolatry. The restoration of them swept away all such ideas." (Adeney)

The Exiles Return

Ezr 2:1 Many of the exiles left the province of Babylon and returned to Jerusalem and Judah, all to their own hometowns. Their families had been living in exile in Babylonia ever since King Nebuchadnezzar had taken them there as prisoners.

Ezr 2:2 Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. This is the list of the clans of Israel, with the number of those from each clan who returned from exile:

Ezr 2:3 (3-20)

- Parosh - 2,172
- Shephatiah - 372
- Arah - 775
- Pahath Moab (descendants of Jeshua and Joab) - 2,812
- Elam - 1,254
- Zattu - 945
- Zaccai - 760
- Bani - 642
- Bebai - 623
- Azgad - 1,222
- Adonikam - 666
- Bigvai - 2,056
- Adin - 454
- Ater (also called Hezekiah) - 98
- Bezai - 323
- Jorah - 112
- Hashum - 223
- Gibbar - 95

Ezr 2:21 (21-35) People whose ancestors had lived in the following towns also returned:

- Bethlehem - 123
- Netophah - 56
- Anathoth - 128

- Azmaveth - 42
- Kiriath Jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth - 743
- Ramah and Geba - 621
- Michmash - 122
- Bethel and Ai - 223
- Nebo - 52
- Magbish - 156
- The other Elam - 1,254
- Harim - 320
- Lod, Hadid, and Ono - 725
- Jericho - 345
- Senaah - 3,630

Ezr 2:36 (36-39) This is the list of the priestly clans that returned from exile:

- Jedaiah (descendants of Jeshua) - 973
- Immer - 1,052
- Pashhur - 1,247
- Harim - 1,017

Ezr 2:40 (40-42) Clans of Levites who returned from exile:

- Jeshua and Kadmiel (descendants of Hodaviah) - 74
- Temple musicians (descendants of Asaph) - 128
- Temple guards (descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai) - 139

Ezr 2:43 (43-54) Clans of Temple workers who returned from exile: Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, Keros, Siaha, Padon, Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub, Hagab, Shamlai, Hanan, Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah, Besai, Asnah, Meunim, Nephisim, Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, Barkos, Sisera, Temah, Neziah, and Hatipha

Ezr 2:55 (55-57) Clans of Solomon's servants who returned from exile: Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, Shephatiah, Hattil, Pochereth Hazzebaim, and Ami

Ezr 2:58 The total number of descendants of the Temple workers and of Solomon's servants who returned from exile was 392.

Ezr 2:59 (59-60) There were 652 belonging to the clans of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda who returned from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer; but they could not prove that they were descendants of Israelites.

Ezr 2:61 (61-62) The following priestly clans could find no record to prove their ancestry: Habaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai. (The ancestor of the priestly clan of Barzillai had married a woman from the clan of Barzillai of Gilead and had taken the name of his father-in-law's clan.) Since they were unable to prove who their ancestors were, they were not accepted as priests.

Ezr 2:63 The Jewish governor told them that they could not eat the food offered to God until there was a priest who could use the Urim and Thummim.

Ezr 2:64 (64-67)

- Total number of exiles who returned - 42,360
- Their male and female servants - 7,337
- Male and female musicians - 200
- Horses - 736
- Mules - 245
- Camels - 435
- Donkeys - 6,720

Ezr 2:68 When the exiles arrived at the LORD's Temple in Jerusalem, some of the leaders of the clans gave freewill offerings to help rebuild the Temple on its old site.

Ezr 2:69 They gave as much as they could for this work, and the total came to 1,030 pounds of gold, 5,740 pounds of silver, and 100 robes for priests.

Ezr 2:70 The priests, the Levites, and some of the people settled in or near Jerusalem; the musicians, the Temple guards, and the Temple workers settled in nearby towns; and the rest of the Israelites settled in the towns where their ancestors had lived.

Ezra 2:1-70

Ezra 2 - List of the Returning Exiles

A. Those returning from exile.

1. (1-2) Those immediately associated with Zerubbabel.

Now these *are* the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his *own* city. Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai,

Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:

a. **Now these are the people of the province who came back from the captivity:** Here begins the list of the families and individuals who made the return to Judah and Jerusalem now that it was a province of the Persian Empire.

i. "The returning exiles were described as 'children of the province' (Ezr 2:1) - *i.e.*, of the Persian province of Judea - and their leader bore the title of a Persian governor (*Tirshatha*, Ezr 2:63). Zerubbabel was no new Moses." (Adeney)

ii. The word **province** is *medina*. "That Medina, a city in Arabia, holdeth this Medina in hard subjection; making her children pay for the very heads they wear; and so grievously affecting them, that they have cause enough to take up anew Jeremiah's elegy over their doleful captivity" (Trapp).

b. **Those who came with Zerubbabel:** Here are eleven names mentioned, yet the list probably should contain twelve names (comparing with Neh 7:7 and noting the twelve sacrificial bulls of Ezr 8:35).

i. "There are eleven names here, but Nehemiah's copy of the list preserves one more, that of Nahamani (Neh 7:7), which has evidently dropped out of this verse in the course of copying. The choice of twelve, like that of the twelve apostles, was a tacit declaration that the community they led was no mere rump or fragment by the embodiment of *the people of Israel*." (Kidner)

ii. **Nehemiah... Mordecai:** "Not that famous Nehemiah nor that renowned Mordecai so much

spoken of in the Book of Esther, but others of the same name.” (Trapp)

c. **Zerubbabel**: Zerubbabel was the appointed governor over the province of Judah. He was also a descendent of the last reigning Judean king.

i. “He was the lineal descendant of the royal house, the heir to the throne of David. This is a most significant fact. It shows that the exiles had retained some latent national character to the return, although, as we have already observed, the main object of it was religious.” (Adeney)

ii. He is probably the same person mentioned in Ezr 1:8 as Sheshbazzar. Ezr 5:16 says that Sheshbazzar laid the foundation of the temple; Ezr 3:8 seems to attribute that work to Zerubbabel. This strengthens the idea that they were in fact the same person.

d. **Jeshua**: Hag 2:1-5 and several other passages among the post-exilic prophets mention this notable co-worker with Zerubbabel.

i. “*Jeshua* the High Priest (Zec 3:1), whose name (in Greek, ‘Jesus’) is spelt Joshua in Haggai and Zechariah, was Zerubbabel’s fellow-leader.” (Kidner)

2. (3-35) *A listing of the families returning to Judah and Jerusalem.*

The people of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two; the people of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two; the people of Arah, seven hundred and seventy-five; the people of Pahath-Moab, of the people of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve; the people of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; the people of Zattu, nine hundred and forty-five; the people of

Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty; the people of Bani, six hundred and forty-two; the people of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-three; the people of Azgad, one thousand two hundred and twenty-two; the people of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-six; the people of Bigvai, two thousand and fifty-six; the people of Adin, four hundred and fifty-four; the people of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety-eight; the people of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-three; the people of Jorah, one hundred and twelve; the people of Hashum, two hundred and twenty-three; the people of Gibbar, ninety-five; the people of Bethlehem, one hundred and twenty-three; the men of Netophah, fifty-six; the men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight; the people of Azmaveth, forty-two; the people of Kirjath Arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three; the people of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one; the men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two; the men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred and twenty-three; the people of Nebo, fifty-two; the people of Magbish, one hundred and fifty-six; the people of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; the people of Harim, three hundred and twenty; the people of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-five; the people of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five; the people of Senaah, three thousand six hundred and thirty.

a. **The people of:** This list names the heads of families, with the numbers of the men of those families. It means that the total number of people would be more, because they are listed and counted by heads of families.

i. "The thousands of homecomers are not lumped together, but (in characteristic biblical fashion) related to those local and family circles which humanize a society and orientate an individual. Such is God's way,

who 'setteth the solitary in families' (Psa 68:6)."
(Kinder)

b. The people of Arah, seven hundred and seventy-five: This differs with the record at Neh 7:10, and points to the often-difficult correlation of numbers between the two passages. It seems that perhaps copyist error is the fault, but others have suggested alternative solutions.

i. "In Neh 7:10, they were only six hundred and fifty-two. It seems seven hundred and seventy-five marched out of Babylon, or gave in their names that they would go; but some of them died, others changed their minds, others were hindered by sickness, or other casualties, happening to themselves or their near relations; and so there came only six hundred and fifty-two to Jerusalem... And the like is to be said in the like differences; which it suffices to hint once for all." (Poole)

ii. "There are many difficulties in this table of names; but as we have no less than *three* copies of it *that* contained here from Ezr 2:1-67, a *second* in Neh 7:6-69, and a *third* in 1Es 5:7-43, on a careful examination they will be found to correct each other." (Clarke)

c. Parosh... Shephatiah... Arah: These names reflect the variety of influences that came in and among the children of Israel during the exile. Many of the names are connected to Biblical ideas, and others have connections to their exilic culture.

i. "The practice of giving Babylonian or Persian names to Jews in captivity (Est 2:7; Dan 1:7) is richly illustrated by the archives of Murashu." (Yamauchi)

ii. The names themselves give a personal flavor.

- **Parosh** means *flea*.
- **Shephatiah** means *Yahweh has judged*.
- **Arah** means *wild ox*.
- **Zaccai** means either *pure* or is a shortened form of *Zechariah*.
- **Bani** is a shortened form of *Benaiah*, meaning *Yahweh has built*.
- **Bebai** means *pupil of the eye*.
- **Azgad** means *Gad is strong*.
- **Adonikam** means *my Lord has arisen*.
- **Adin** means *voluptuous*.
- **Ater** means *lefty*.
- **Bezai** is a shortened form of *Bezaleel* and means *in the shadow of God*.
- **Jorah** means *autumn rain*.
- **Hashum** means *broad nose*.
- **Gibbar** means *strong man*.

3. (36-57) A listing of the priests, Levites, and temple workers returning from exile.

The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three; the sons of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two; the sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven; the sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen. The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, seventy-four. The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and twenty-eight. The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, and the sons of Shobai, one hundred and

thirty-nine *in* all. The Nethinim: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth, the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon, the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hagab, the sons of Shalmal, the sons of Hanan, the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah, the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam, the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai, the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephusim, the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur, the sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha, the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Tamah, the sons of Nezhiah, and the sons of Hatipha. The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Peruda, the sons of Jaala, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel, the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth of Zebaim, and the sons of Ami.

a. **Jedaiah... Immer... Pashhur... Harim:** These families represent only four of the twenty-four divisions of the priesthood established by King David in 1Ch 24:8. Most of the priests stayed behind in Babylon.

b. **The sons of Hanan:** "'Hanan' ('[God] is gracious') is derived from the verb *hanan* ('to be gracious'), and its derivatives are the components of numerous names borne by fifty-one persons in the Old Testament. These include Baalhanan, Elhanan, Hananel, Hanani, Hananiah, Hannah, Hanun, Henadad, Jehohanan, and Tehinnah. 'Johanan' ('Yahweh is gracious') has given us the name John. The woman's name Hannah gives us Anna, Ann, Nan, and Nancy" (Yamauchi).

i. **Bakbuk** means "bottle," referring to an earthenware container with a neck and a bulging

body. Mr. **Babkuk** man have earned his nickname by his big belly; or because his constant chatter sounded like the bubbling sound of water poured out from a bottle.

c. **The Levites:** The total number of Levites was actually less than the number of priests that returned. This means that a remarkably small percentage of the Levites returned from Babylon.

i. "An examination of this list is remarkable principally from the small number of Levites who returned. Nearly ten times as many priests as Levites went back to the land. This, of course, was an inversion of the original order." (Morgan)

ii. Some speculate that the Levites were particularly invested in worship at the high places, scattered on the hills all around pre-exilic Israel and Judah. The purifying fires of exile effectively burned out this idolatrous impulse, and therefore few Levites wanted to return to the Promised Land.

4. (58) *Two special groups who came back from exile.*

All the Nethinim and the children of Solomon's servants were three hundred and ninety-two.

b. **All the Nethinim:** These seem to be the descendants of the Gibeonites, who were made special servants of the Levites and the priests at the temple.

i. "These were those Gibeonites that, have saved their lives by a lie, were made drawers of water to the temple as a punishment... Their employment was to minister to the Levites." (Trapp)

ii. "It seems likely that the more menial tasks fell to these men; and the presence of some foreign-looking names in the list may indicate that some of these groups came into Israel from David's conquests,

whether as immigrants or perhaps as prisoners of war.” (Kidner)

b. **The children of Solomon’s servants:** Most believe that these were those employed by Solomon who came from other people groups. They came into Israel as foreign proselytes.

i. “These also were strangers, that had been employed by Solomon, and becoming proselytes, were incorporated into the commonwealth of Israel. God is no respecter of persons.” (Trapp)

5. (59-63) *Those among the priests with uncertain genealogies who returned from exile.*

And these were the ones who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer; but they could not identify their father’s house or their genealogy, whether they were of Israel: the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and fifty-two; and of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Koz, and the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name. These sought their listing *among* those who were registered by genealogy, but they were not found; therefore they *were excluded* from the priesthood as defiled. And the governor said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim.

a. **These sought their listing among those who were registered by genealogy, but they were not found:** This shows an admirable respect for God’s law respecting the priesthood of Israel. These were those who had some claim to a priestly lineage but could not prove their **genealogy**. They were therefore **excluded from the priesthood as defiled**.

i. "So shall all be at the last day that are not written among the living in Jerusalem, that are not registered in the Lamb's book of life." (Trapp)

ii. "*Barzillai* was a name that carried considerable weight; its bearer had been a staunch supporter of David, and a man of wealth (2Sa 19:32). It may be that in adopting this family's name (and becoming its heir?) the ancestor of these claimants had laid himself open to the charge that he had renounced his own birthright, the priesthood." (Kidner)

b. They should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim:

Those with questionable genealogies were not permanently excluded; each case required more research and seeking God.

i. "The Urim and Thummim, together with the Ark and the Shekinah, are named by the rabbis among the precious things that were never recovered." (Adeney)

6. (64-67) The summary of the returning exiles.

The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred *and* sixty, besides their male and female servants, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred men and women singers. Their horses *were* seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and *their* donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

a. **The whole assembly together:** The size of this entire group is here stated to be about 50,000. However, this was only the first wave of repatriation to Israel from the Babylonian captivity and includes only the heads of families. The approximate total of the returned exiles was

probably somewhere between 100,000 and 150,000. This was only a small percentage of those who had been exiled and their descendants; the great majority stayed behind in Babylon.

i. As a whole, Israelites had some reason to feel comfortable in Babylon. The Murashu tablets were discovered in 1873 and are records from Murashu and his sons, wealthy bankers and brokers of the late period of exile, who seemed to loan out almost anything for a price. "Among their customers are listed about sixty Jewish names from the time of Artaxerxes I, and forty from the time of Darius II. These appear as contracting parties, agents, witnesses, collectors of taxes, and royal officials. There seems to have been no social or commercial barriers between the Jews and the Babylonians. Their prosperous situation may explain why some chose to remain in Mesopotamia." (Yamauchi)

ii. Indeed, Josephus wrote, "many remained in Babylon, being unwilling to leave their possessions" (Antiquities XI, 8).

iii. One should not think that there was no spiritual life among the Jewish exiles; Ezekiel (who went into exile after 597 or 586 b.c.) describes what we might call a "home Bible study" at his home with the elders of Judah (Eze 8:1). "Deprived of the temple, the exiles laid great stress on the observation of the Sabbath, on the laws of purity, and on prayer and fasting. It has often been suggested that the development of synagogues began in Mesopotamia during the Exile." (Yamauchi) Indeed, "In the Talmud it is said that only the chaff returned, while the wheat remained behind." (Adeney)

iv. When the exiles came back to Judah, they found a much smaller state than their forefathers had before the Babylonians conquered Judah. One estimate cited in Yamauchi says that the post-exilic province of Judah was about 25 miles from north to south and about 32 miles from east to west. The total area was about 800 square miles, about one third of which was uncultivable desert.

v. "Depending on one's estimate of the numbers deported and the number of returning exiles, we have widely varying estimates for the population of postexilic Judah: 20,000 to 50,000 by W.F. Albright, 60,000 by H. Kreissig, 50,000 to 80,000 by J. de Fraine, 85,000 by R. Kittel, 100,000 by S. Mowinckel, 150,000 by J. Weinberg, and 235,000 by A. Schultz. An estimate of 150,000 is more probably correct than Albright's estimate." (Yamauchi)

vi. "The figure of 42,360 appears as the total also in Neh 7:66 and 1Es 5:41, yet the individual items add up to three different totals, as follows: Ezra 29,818; Nehemiah 31,089; 1 Esdras 30,143. There have been attempts to explain the missing thousands: as members of the northern tribes, or as women, or as adolescents. But the narrative is silent on such points." (Kidner)

b. Their horses... their mules... their camels... their donkeys: This group did not return with much, but they also did not return with nothing.

i. "They went into captivity, stripped of everything; they now return from it, abounding in the most substantial riches... Thus we find that God, in the midst of judgment, remembered mercy, and gave them favour in the land of their captivity." (Clarke)

B. The returned exiles make their home in the Promised Land.

1. (68-69) The offerings made for the rebuilding of the temple.

Some of the heads of the fathers' houses, when they came to the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God, to erect it in its place: According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work sixty-one thousand gold drachmas, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly garments.

a. **Offered freely for the house of God:** Because of prominence of those who made this offering (**the heads of the fathers' houses**) and the priority in this record, we see how important it was for the leaders and the people to sacrificially give to the work of rebuilding the temple.

b. **According to their ability:** These people gave generously, as generously as they could **according to their ability**. This showed how highly valued the house of God was in their eyes.

i. "The phrase, *according to their ability*, does credit to these donors, and Paul may have had it in mind in his charge to the Corinthians to give in proportion to their gains (1Co 16:2)" (Kidner). Yet Paul also noted those who gave even *beyond* their ability (2Co 8:3).

2. (70) The restoration of a substantial Israeli presence in the Promised Land.

So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

a. **The priests and the Levites... dwelt in their cities:** This shows that Jerusalem was once again

populated, even though it was a humble beginning.

i. "There would soon be daily sacrifices to offer, many worshippers to attend to, and much work to supervise." (Kidner)

ii. "Later Nehemiah would be compelled to move people by lot to reinforce the population of Jerusalem, as the capital city had suffered the severest loss of life at the time of the Babylonian attacks." (Yamauchi)

b. Dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities:

After two generations in exile, there was again a substantial presence of Jewish people in the land that was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was a wonderful fulfillment of God's promise to bring Israel back from exile.

i. "For during their abode in Babylon Judaea lay utterly waste and uninhabited. The land kept her Sabbaths, resting from tillage, and God, by a wonderful providence, kept the room empty till the return of the natives." (Trapp)

ii. "Almost the whole community of Babylonian exiles who stayed when Babylon was destroyed came to this country then years ago - and their number was nearly thrice the number of those who returned to Zion in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah." (David Ben-Gurion, cited in Yamauchi describing the modern emigration of Jews from Iraq to Israel)

Rebuilding the Altar

Ezr 3:1 By the seventh month the people of Israel were all settled in their towns. Then they all assembled in Jerusalem,

Ezr 3:2 and Joshua son of Jehozadak, his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, together with his relatives, rebuilt the altar of the God of Israel, so that they could burn

sacrifices on it according to the instructions written in the Law of Moses, the man of God.

Ezr 3:3 Even though the returning exiles were afraid of the people who were living in the land, they rebuilt the altar where it had stood before. Then they began once again to burn on it the regular morning and evening sacrifices.

Ezr 3:4 They celebrated the Festival of Shelters according to the regulations; each day they offered the sacrifices required for that day;

Ezr 3:5 and in addition they offered the regular sacrifices to be burned whole and those to be offered at the New Moon Festival and at all the other regular assemblies at which the LORD is worshiped, as well as all the offerings that were given to the LORD voluntarily.

Ezr 3:6 Although the people had not yet started to rebuild the Temple, they began on the first day of the seventh month to burn sacrifices to the LORD.

Ezr 3:7 The people gave money to pay the stonemasons and the carpenters and gave food, drink, and olive oil to be sent to the cities of Tyre and Sidon in exchange for cedar trees from Lebanon, which were to be brought by sea to Joppa. All this was done with the permission of Emperor Cyrus of Persia.

Rebuilding the Temple

Ezr 3:8 So in the second month of the year after they came back to the site of the Temple in Jerusalem, they began work. Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the rest of their people, the priests, and the Levites, in fact all the exiles who had come back to Jerusalem, joined in the work. All the Levites twenty years of age or older were put in charge of the work of rebuilding the Temple.

Ezr 3:9 The Levite Jeshua and his sons and relatives, and Kadmiel and his sons (the clan of Hodaviah) joined together

in taking charge of the rebuilding of the Temple. (They were helped by the Levites of the clan of Henadad.)

Ezr 3:10 When the builders started to lay the foundation of the Temple, the priests in their robes took their places with trumpets in their hands, and the Levites of the clan of Asaph stood there with cymbals. They praised the LORD according to the instructions handed down from the time of King David.

Ezr 3:11 They sang the LORD's praises, repeating the refrain: "The LORD is good, and his love for Israel is eternal." Everyone shouted with all their might, praising the LORD, because the work on the foundation of the Temple had been started.

Ezr 3:12 Many of the older priests, Levites, and heads of clans had seen the first Temple, and as they watched the foundation of this Temple being laid, they cried and wailed. But the others who were there shouted for joy.

Ezr 3:13 No one could distinguish between the joyful shouts and the crying, because the noise they made was so loud that it could be heard for miles.

Ezra 3:1-13

Ezra 3 - A Foundation for the New Temple

A. The restoration of regular worship in Jerusalem.

*1. (1) Beginning in the **seventh month**.*

And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

- a. **When the seventh month had come:** This was an important month on the spiritual calendar of Israel. In the **seventh month** they celebrated the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Trumpets, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

b. **The people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem:** This was an encouraging sign of obedience among the returned exiles. In a time of small resources and great work to be done, they took the time and money to observe the commands to gather in Jerusalem for the major feasts.

2. (2-3) *The altar is rebuilt on its ancient foundation.*

Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as *it is* written in the Law of Moses the man of God. Though fear *had come* upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, *both* the morning and evening burnt offerings.

a. **Jeshua... and Zerubbabel:** These were the two main leaders in this rebuilding project, beginning their work with building the altar that stood outside the temple on the temple mount in Jerusalem. Out of the rubble of the destroyed temple and its courts, an altar now stood ready to receive sacrifices both on behalf of the people as a whole and individuals who brought their offerings.

i. It is significant that they **built the altar** in *Jerusalem*, on the same ground where it had once stood. They might have reasoned that the altar (and conceivably also the temple) could go anywhere, because Yahweh was God of the entire earth. Yet in the Jewish mind, there was only *one* place where the altar and the temple could stand: on God's holy hill (Psa 2:6; Psa 99:9), in His holy land (Zec 2:12).

ii. **Jeshua** "was the grandson of Seraiah the high priest, who was put to death by Nebuchadnezzar,

2Ki 25:18; 2Ki 25:21. This Jeshua or Joshua was the first high priest after the captivity" (Clarke).

b. Arose and built the altar of the God of Israel:

Long before they could rebuild the temple, they wisely started with building the **altar** for **burnt offerings** and other sacrifices.

i. They **built the altar** first because it was something they could do relatively quickly and easily. We begin a great work by doing first *what we can*.

ii. They **built the altar** first because they understood its *spiritual significance*. Fundamentally, the altar was where sin was dealt with and where the common man met with God (the temple was only for the priests to enter). They started with the **altar** because it was a *wise spiritual priority*, showing they understood their need to have atonement from sin and acts of dedication to God.

iii. They **built the altar** first because it was an act of *obedience* to do so. They needed to resume the **burnt offerings** for the atonement of sin and the **morning and evening burnt offerings** because all this was **written in the Law of Moses the man of God**.

iv. "This is the first thing that must be done before our temple-building or other undertakings can be crowned with success... The new start that God Himself was giving would have been invalidated without the altar, which meant forgiveness for the past, and renewed consecration for the future." (Meyer)

v. "Thus, we see, the full establishment of religious services precedes the building of the temple. A weighty truth is enshrined in this apparently

incongruous fact. The worship itself is felt to be more important than the house in which it is to be celebrated.” (Adeney)

vi. “There cannot be a temple without an altar, but there may be an altar without a temple. God meets men at the place of sacrifice, even though there be no house for His name.” (Maclaren)

c. Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries: When they **built the altar** unto the LORD on the temple mount in Jerusalem, they probably destroyed a crude altar that had been built on that spot by the scattered remnant who inhabited the area during the two generations of exile. In building this altar they formally announced their presence and proclaimed their intention to rebuild the temple.

i. Morgan suggests they also were afraid of the spiritual threat from the **peoples of those countries**: “They were conscious of how, in the neglect of the altar of God in the past, they had become contaminated by the idolatrous practices of surrounding peoples, and in order to prevent a repetition of such failure, they immediately set up the true altar.”

ii. “The ruined Jerusalem was better guarded by that altar than if its fallen walls had been rebuilt.” (Maclaren)

d. They set the altar on its bases: This means that they found the old foundations for the previous altar and built the new one upon the exact place as the old, which dated back to David’s altar on the threshing floor of Araunah (2Sa 24:16-19).

i. “The altar was set *in its place*, i.e. its traditional and proper place.” (Kidner) “Rebuilt it on the *same spot* on

which it had formerly stood.” (Clarke)

ii. “There is something very pathetic in the picture of the assembled people groping amid the ruins on the Temple hill, to find ‘the bases,’ the half-obliterated outlines, of the foundations of the old altar of burnt offerings.” (Maclaren)

iii. The centrality of the altar, set upon its ancient foundations, was essential for them - as it is for us. We have an altar (Heb 13:10, the cross of Jesus Christ, set upon its ancient foundations. The altar was to them what the cross is to Christians under the new covenant.

3. (4-6) The feast is observed, and regular sacrifice is resumed.

They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as *it is* written, and *offered* the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day. Afterwards *they offered* the regular burnt offering, and *those* for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and *those* of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the LORD. From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, although the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid.

a. **They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles:** This great, joyful feast (one of the three major feasts of Israel) celebrated God’s faithfulness to Israel during the wilderness journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.

i. During this feast the families of Israel were commanded to camp out in temporary shelters, meant to remind them of how their forefathers lived during the exodus. In this context - when in returning

to destroyed cities, they were forced to live this way until they could properly rebuild - the **Feast of Tabernacles** held a special meaning for these returned Jews to Judah.

b. They offered the regular burnt offering... all the appointed feasts of the LORD... freewill offering to the LORD: This describes the regular resumption of sacrifice at the altar, and all this was done before **the foundation of the temple** had been laid.

i. "During their long stay in Babylon, the Jews were not able to offer any sacrifices, as this could only be done in Jerusalem. Instead they were surrounded by a myriad of pagan temples. About fifty temples are mentioned in Babylonian texts together with 180 open-air shrines for Ishtar, three hundred daises for the Igigi gods, and twelve hundred daises for the Anunnaki gods." (Yamauchi)

ii. "The new moon marked the first day of the month and was a holy day (Num 28:11-15)." (Yamauchi)

4. (7) Preparations for rebuilding the temple.

They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

a. They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters: Once the work of restoration began at the altar of sacrifice, they followed through by assembling and hiring the workers they needed to build the temple.

b. Cedar logs from Lebanon: The cedar trees of Lebanon were legendary for their excellent timber. This meant that they wanted to use the best materials they could in construction and the same materials that

Solomon used in building the first temple (1Ki 5:6), though they had far fewer resources than Solomon had.

c. **According to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia:** This **permission** was not only the legal allowance to build the temple, but it also included financial support from the royal treasury (**permission** can also be translated *grant*).

i. "Since permission to buy materials would hardly need specifying, it is reasonable to take the work to include provision as well as permission, as with our own word 'grant'." (Kidner)

ii. This shows that they used Gentile money to purchase the supplies (from Gentile Lebanon) to build the second temple. Solomon's temple used Gentile supplies and laborers; God directed the building of the second temple to likewise be built with Gentile cooperation.

B. Work begins on the temple.

1. (8-11) *Great joy and worship as the work begins.*

Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began *work* and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the LORD. Then Jeshua *with* his sons and brothers, Kadmiel *with* his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God: the sons of Henadad *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites. When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites,

the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD:

**“For *He is good,*
For His mercy *endures* forever toward Israel.”**

Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

a. In the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem: The work seemed to begin as soon as it could, allowing for the logistical preparations described in Ezr 3:7. Significantly, the site was called **the house of God at Jerusalem** before the temple was built and while the former temple was still a ruin.

i. “This would hardly have escaped their notice - the second was the month in which Solomon’s Temple had been started (1Ki 6:1).” (Kidner)

b. Appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work: The Law of Moses commanded that the Levites begin their service at thirty years of age (Num 4:1-3; Num 4:3-47). David changed the starting point for Levitical service to twenty years of age (1Ch 23:24). Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, they adopted David’s revised practice.

c. When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD: This was a memorable scene. The priests were dressed in their ceremonial **apparel**, the musicians were ready to **praise the LORD** with instruments and song, and they **sang responsively** in an arranged presentation.

i. In general, the description matches the massive and elaborate dedication ceremony for Solomon's temple (2Ch 5:13), except this was held in far humbler circumstances.

d. **They praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid:** It was an appropriately joyful occasion. Since the destruction of the temple under the Babylonian conquest there had been no proper place for sacrifice and worship for the people of Israel. Another important step was made in the long and difficult process of the restoration of Biblical worship and service to God.

i. "This time there is no ark, no visible glory, indeed no Temple; only some beginnings, and small beginnings at that. But God is enthroned on the praises of Israel, and these could be as glorious as Solomon's." (Kidner)

2. (12-13) *The mixed reaction among the people.*

But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.

a. **Old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes:** The older men knew that this temple would never match up to the glory of the first. After all, King Solomon spent the modern equivalent of five to eight billion dollars on building the first temple. They also remembered the horrible end of the first temple, and these combined with the joy of the

restoration to make profound mixed feelings in the **old men**.

i. "Possibly some of them had stood on this very spot half a century before, in an agony of despair, while they saw the cruel flames licking the ancient stones and blazing up among the cedar beams, and all the fine gold dimmed with black clouds of smoke." (Adeney)

ii. "They saw that the glory had departed from Israel; in their circumstances it was impossible to build such a house as the first temple was; and had this been even possible, still it would have been greatly inferior, because it wanted the ark of the covenant, the heavenly fire, the mercy-seat, the heavenly manna, Aaron's rod that budded, the divine shechinah, the spirit of prophecy and most probably the Urim and Thummim." (Clarke)

iii. There was a danger in their weeping. "The backward look which discounts present activity is always a peril. Regrets over the past which paralyse work in the present are always wrong. Moreover all such regrets, as in this case, are in danger of blinding the eyes to the true value and significance of the present" (Morgan).

iv. The prophets warned against despising this temple for its humble beginnings (Hag 2:1-9, Zec 4:8-10).

b. **Yet many shouted aloud for joy:** The younger, who had no remembrance of the prior temple, felt nothing but joy in seeing this important step in the restoration of the temple and its worship.

c. **So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of**

the people: This profound scene showed the depth of the mixed feelings among the people.

i. "The sight must have been very affecting: a whole people, one part *crying* aloud with *sorrow*; the other shouting aloud for *joy*; and on the same occasion too, in which both sides felt an equal interest!" (Clarke)

Adversaries Oppose the Rebuilding

Ezr 4:1 The enemies of the people of Judah and Benjamin heard that those who had returned from exile were rebuilding the Temple of the LORD, the God of Israel.

Ezr 4:2 So they went to see Zerubbabel and the heads of the clans and said, "Let us join you in building the Temple. We worship the same God you worship, and we have been offering sacrifices to him ever since Emperor Esarhaddon of Assyria sent us here to live."

Ezr 4:3 Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the heads of the clans told them, "We don't need your help to build a temple for the LORD our God. We will build it ourselves, just as Emperor Cyrus of Persia commanded us."

Ezr 4:4 Then the people who had been living in the land tried to discourage and frighten the Jews and keep them from building.

Ezr 4:5 They also bribed Persian government officials to work against them. They kept on doing this throughout the reign of Emperor Cyrus and into the reign of Emperor Darius.

Ezr 4:6 At the beginning of the reign of Emperor Xerxes, the enemies of the people living in Judah and Jerusalem brought written charges against them.

The Letter to King Artaxerxes

Ezr 4:7 Again in the reign of Emperor Artaxerxes of Persia, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and their associates wrote a

letter to the emperor. The letter was written in Aramaic and was to be translated when read.

Ezr 4:8 Also Rehum, the governor, and Shimshai, the secretary of the province, wrote the following letter to Emperor Artaxerxes about Jerusalem:

Ezr 4:9 "From Rehum, the governor, from Shimshai, secretary of the province, from their associates, the judges, and from all the other officials, who are originally from Erech, Babylon, and Susa in the land of Elam,

Ezr 4:10 together with the other peoples whom the great and powerful Ashurbanipal moved from their homes and settled in the city of Samaria and elsewhere in West-of-Euphrates Province."

Ezr 4:11 This is the text of the letter: "To Emperor Artaxerxes from his servants who live in West-of-Euphrates.

Ezr 4:12 "We want Your Majesty to know that the Jews who came here from your other territories have settled in Jerusalem and are rebuilding that evil and rebellious city. They have begun to rebuild the walls and will soon finish them.

Ezr 4:13 Your Majesty, if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the people will stop paying taxes, and your royal revenues will decrease.

Ezr 4:14 Now, because we are under obligation to Your Majesty, we do not want to see this happen, and so we suggest

Ezr 4:15 that you order a search to be made in the records your ancestors kept. If you do, you will discover that this city has always been rebellious and that from ancient times it has given trouble to kings and to rulers of provinces. Its people have always been hard to govern. This is why the city was destroyed.

Ezr 4:16 We therefore are convinced that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, Your Majesty will no longer be able to control West-of-Euphrates Province."

The King Orders the Work to Cease

Ezr 4:17 The emperor sent this answer: "To Rehum, the governor, to Shimshai, secretary of the province, and to their associates who live in Samaria and in the rest of West-of-Euphrates, greetings.

Ezr 4:18 "The letter which you sent has been translated and read to me.

Ezr 4:19 I gave orders for an investigation to be made, and it has indeed been found that from ancient times Jerusalem has revolted against royal authority and that it has been full of rebels and troublemakers.

Ezr 4:20 Powerful kings have reigned there and have ruled over the entire province of West-of-Euphrates, collecting taxes and revenue.

Ezr 4:21 Therefore you are to issue orders that those men are to stop rebuilding the city until I give further commands.

Ezr 4:22 Do this at once, so that no more harm may be done to my interests."

Ezr 4:23 As soon as this letter from Emperor Artaxerxes was read to Rehum, Shimshai, and their associates, they hurried to Jerusalem and forced the Jews to stop rebuilding the city.

Ezr 4:24 Work on the Temple had been stopped and had remained at a standstill until the second year of the reign of Emperor Darius of Persia.

Ezra 4:1-24

Ezra 4 - Samaritan Attempts to Stop the Work

"From this point onwards right to the end of Nehemiah there is conflict. Nothing that is attempted for God will now go unchallenged, and scarcely a tactic be unexplored by the opposition." (Derek Kidner)

A. The offer of a dangerous alliance.

1. (1-2) Adversaries try to join the work of building the temple.

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you *do*; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."

a. **Now when the adversaries:** Judea was not completely empty of inhabitants in the two generations of captivity. There was a remnant descended from the lowest and poorest of the land that was left behind in the exile, combined with the few who had drifted into the largely desolate area. These people were not happy that **Judah and Benjamin** had come back to Judea and thus they were their **adversaries**.

i. These were the early *Samaritans*, those who were brought into the lands of the former Kingdom of Israel after its fall to the Assyrians, who intermarried with those left behind from the exile. In the two generations of exile after the fall of the Kingdom of Judah, they had also expanded somewhat into the lands of Judah.

ii. The Samaritans continued as a people into New Testament times. Because the Samaritans had some historical connection to the people of Israel, their faith

was a combination of law and ritual from the Law of Moses and various superstitions. Most Jews in Jesus' time *despised* the Samaritans, even more than Gentiles - because they were, religiously speaking, "half-breeds" who had an eclectic, mongrel faith. This context is essential in understanding the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luk 10:25-37.

iii. 2Ki 17:24 tells the attitude of the Samaritans: *They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods; according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.*

b. Heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel: The noise from the dedication ceremony at the end of Ezra 3 got the attention of these scattered peoples, signaling them that the returning Jews were serious about re-establishing a permanent presence in Judea.

c. Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do: They wanted to become partners in the building work, yet they were still **adversaries**. They wanted to partner in the work either to ruin it or to influence it to their benefit.

i. "Their subsequent conduct was so bitterly ill-natured that we are driven to think that they must have had some selfish aims from the first." (Adeney)

ii. "The proposal to unite in building the Temple was a political move; for, in old-world ideas, co-operation in Temple-building was incorporation in national unity. The calculation, no doubt, was that if the returning exiles could be united with the much more numerous Samaritans, they would soon be absorbed in them." (Maclaren)

iii. They did this on the claim that **we seek your God as you do**. They probably said this with all sincerity; they genuinely believed that they sought the same God in the same way. Yet they also added, **“and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria.”** This means they sacrificed without either a temple or a priesthood, which was obviously against the commandment of God. This completely contradicted their claim, **“we seek your God as you do.”**

iv. To the Samaritans, Yahweh was one of many powerful gods. Their idolatry represented a grave danger, because Israel was exiled for their idolatry. This was a dangerous partnership for the returned exiles.

v. “There may seem to be great loss and needless sacrifice in dispensing with the help of Rehum and Shimshai; but if once we accepted their help, we should discover to our cost that they were adversaries still, and that their only desire was to retard our efforts.” (Meyer)

2. (3) *Zerubbabel rightly refuses their offer.*

But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers’ houses of Israel said to them, “You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.”

a. **Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers’ houses of Israel said to them:** Importantly, their response was unified. All the returned exiles were agreed upon this answer to the Samaritans.

b. **You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God:** With one voice, they refused the help of the

Samaritans. They did this knowing they had the permission (even the **command**) of **King Cyrus**, and knowing they lacked both human and financial resources.

i. It was an important step of faith to refuse a partnership that might have seemed helpful. We can imagine that there were a few pragmatists among them who said, "We need any help we can get. We can guard ourselves against ungodly influences they may bring." In weak or early circumstances of a building work there is often a serious temptation to take *any* help and to ignore the dangers of unwise and ungodly partnerships.

ii. "The Samaritans did not worship Jehovah as the Jews, but along with their own gods (2Ki 17:25-41). To divide His dominion with others was to dethrone Him altogether. It therefore became an act of faithfulness to Jehovah to reject the entangling alliance." (Maclaren)

iii. "If they had taken an active share and labour and sacrifice of the construction of the temple, they could not have been excluded afterwards from taking part in the temple worship." (Adeney)

iv. "Men of faith have often fallen into this blunder, and have associated with themselves those not sharing their faith, and therefore in the deepest sense opposed to their enterprises. These leaders were not deceived. They detected the peril." (Morgan)

v. "Such inclusion of the unyielded is, moreover, a wrong done to them, as it gives them a false sense of security." (Morgan)

B. The broad outline of Samaritan resistance to the work in Jerusalem.

1. (4-5) *The resistance under the reign of Cyrus [539-530 b.c.].*

Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

a. **Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah:** This response to the refusal of partnership revealed their evil intent. If they could not attack the work through a subversive partnership, they would then attack the work through discouraging the workers, troubling the builders, and lobbying against them in the court of King Cyrus.

i. "'To discourage' is literally 'to weaken the hands,' a Hebrew idiom (cf. Jer 38:4).'" (Yamauchi)

b. **All the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia:** This section (Ezr 4:4-23) is a broad overview of Samaritan resistance to the work of rebuilding the temple and the city of Jerusalem, extending into the days of Nehemiah. It is a section unto itself, somewhat interrupting the flow of the text from Ezr 4:3-24.

i. By taking out this section unto itself and simply reading from Ezr 4:3-24, we see that the work of building the *temple* was interrupted for several years during the reigns of **Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.**

ii. There are two other kings described in this chapter: *Ahasuerus* (Xerxes, who reigned between 485 and 465 b.c.) and Artaxerxes I (who reigned between 464 and 424 b.c.). Even after the temple was finished under Zerubbabel, the Samaritans continued to

oppose the work of rebuilding the *city* of Jerusalem, and this ongoing resistance is briefly chronicled in this section of Ezr 4:4-23.

2. (6) *The resistance under the reign of Ahasuerus [485-465 b.c.].*

In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

a. **In the reign of Ahasuerus... they wrote an accusation:** The Samaritan adversaries against the people of Judah sought to stop the work in this way through influencing the king against the builders.

b. **In the beginning of his reign:** This showed a true enterprising spirit among the adversaries of God's people. They were wrong, but they were energetic and enterprising in their wrong work.

i. "*Ahasuerus*, familiar to us from the book of Esther... The mention of him here marks simply the passage of time, which had still not cooled the enemy's antagonism. But evidently nothing came of this attempt." (Kidner)

3. (7-16) *The resistance under the reign of Artaxerxes I [464-424 b.c.].*

In the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter was written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language. Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes in this fashion: From Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; *representatives* of the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia

and Erech and Babylon and Shushan, the Dehavites, the Elamites, and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnapper took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River; and so forth. (This *is* a copy of the letter that they sent him) To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men *of the region* beyond the River, and so forth: Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing *its* walls and repairing the foundations. Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city *is* a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed. We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.

a. **And translated into the Aramaic language:** Starting at Ezr 4:8 and continuing all the way until 6:18, everything is written in Aramaic (instead of Hebrew); Ezr 7:12-26 is also in Aramaic.

i. "The letter was probably dictated in Persian to a scribe, who translated it into Aramaic and wrote it down in Aramaic script." (Yamauchi)

b. And are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations: This indicates that the work they complained against was not the work of rebuilding the temple, because that work was already completed. This was resistance to the work of rebuilding the city and its walls.

i. We know that the temple was completed sooner rather than later for several reasons. One is that the same Zerubbabel who started the work also saw it finished (Zec 4:9). Another is that some of the same people who saw the glory of Solomon's temple also lived long enough to see Zerubbabel's temple finished (Hag 2:3).

ii. "It should hardly need emphasizing that the *walls* and *foundations* are those of the *city*, not the Temple; but the two operations are often confused. By the reign of Artaxerxes the new Temple had been standing for half a century." (Kidner)

c. They will not pay tax, tribute, or custom: This was a lie and a false accusation. They recalled the prior sins of Jerusalem (**the rebellious and evil city**) and attributed them to these chastened, returned, exiles.

d. It was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor: They skillfully shaped their words to claim they were supporting and protecting the king.

i. **Now because we receive support from the palace:** "More literally: *Now because at all times we are salted with the salt of the palace*; i.e., We live on the king's bounty, and must be faithful to our benefactor." (Clarke)

e. This city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces: Cleverly calling attention to Jerusalem's

sinful past, the Samaritans argued that allowing the building work to continue would make it so that the king of Persia would **have no dominion beyond the River**.

i. Their attack by letter was a skillful combination of truth and lies. It was true that Jerusalem had a sinful past; yet with these returned exiles, it truly was the past and not the present. However, that truth was completely irrelevant because of the great lie - the lie that Jews and the builders of Jerusalem had a rebellious intent.

ii. In a similar pattern our adversaries - Satan and his angels, the enemies of our soul - often attack us with a combination of truth and lies. They tell us of our great sin (an accusation that is often true), but they lie about the greater work of Jesus. Since Satan also accuses us before the God (Rev 12:10), he brings his accusing report against us before the Great King.

4. (17-23) The king commands that they work stop until further notice.

The king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and to the remainder beyond the River: Peace, and so forth. The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me. And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all *the region* beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them. Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me. Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should

damage increase to the hurt of the kings? Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease.

a. **It was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it:** The Samaritan letter to stop the work was a combination of truth and lies, and here the Persian king focused on the *truth* in the letter - the sinful and tragic past of Jerusalem.

b. **There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem:** Artaxerxes I also noted that in times past there were in fact powerful kings of Judah, who had the power to **tax** and impose **tribute** on their neighbors. In his mind, it meant that Judah had the potential to return to this powerful past.

i. **Who have ruled over all the region beyond the River:** "That is, the Euphrates. Both David and Solomon carried their conquests beyond this river. See 2Sa 8:3 and following, and 1Ki 4:21, where it is said, *Solomon reigned over all the kingdoms from the river (Euphrates) unto the land of the Philistines; and unto the borders of Egypt.*" (Clarke)

c. **Now give the command to make these men cease:** The letter from the Samaritan adversaries was successful. Artaxerxes King of Persia, perhaps the most powerful man in the world at that time, commanded that the work be stopped.

d. **By force of arms made them cease:** The adversaries made the most of the decree of Artaxerxes and used it to make the work stop immediately.

5. (24) *The previous work of rebuilding the temple in the days of Darius is again considered.*

Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

a. **Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased:** Through the kinds of tactics of the Samaritans mentioned in the broad survey of Ezr 4:4-23, these adversaries succeeded in stopping the building work for some 15 years.

i. "The word '*Then*' would at first point us to the verse immediately before this; but it only makes sense if it is picking up the thread of verse 5 which was dropped for the long parenthesis (6-23). The time is again that of Zerubbabel." (Kidner)

b. **Until the second year of the reign of Darius:** This shows us that the work did not stop forever. Though the adversaries attacked through both subversive partnership and lies to authorities, and seemed to succeed with their second tactic, they could not succeed forever against God and His people. Their only victory was to *delay* the work, not to *defeat* it.

Rebuilding Begins Anew

Ezr 5:1 At that time two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo, began to speak in the name of the God of Israel to the Jews who lived in Judah and Jerusalem.

Ezr 5:2 When Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jehozadak heard their messages, they began to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, and the two prophets helped them.

Ezr 5:3 Almost at once Governor Tattenai of West-of-Euphrates, Shethar Bozenai, and their fellow officials came

to Jerusalem and demanded: "Who gave you orders to build this Temple and equip it?"

Ezr 5:4 They also asked for the names of all the men who were helping build the Temple.

Ezr 5:5 But God was watching over the Jewish leaders, and the Persian officials decided to take no action until they could write to Emperor Darius and receive a reply.

Tattenai's Letter to King Darius

Ezr 5:6 This is the report that they sent to the emperor:

Ezr 5:7 "To Emperor Darius, may you rule in peace.

Ezr 5:8 "Your Majesty should know that we went to the province of Judah and found that the Temple of the great God is being rebuilt with large stone blocks and with wooden beams set in the wall. The work is being done with great care and is moving ahead steadily.

Ezr 5:9 "We then asked the leaders of the people to tell us who had given them authority to rebuild the Temple and to equip it.

Ezr 5:10 We also asked them their names so that we could inform you who the leaders of this work are.

Ezr 5:11 "They answered, 'We are servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the Temple which was originally built and equipped many years ago by a powerful king of Israel.

Ezr 5:12 But because our ancestors made the God of Heaven angry, he let them be conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia, a king of the Chaldean dynasty. The Temple was destroyed, and the people were taken into exile in Babylonia.

Ezr 5:13 Then in the first year of the reign of King Cyrus as emperor of Babylonia, Cyrus issued orders for the Temple to be rebuilt.

Ezr 5:14 He restored the gold and silver Temple utensils which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple in Babylon. Emperor Cyrus turned these utensils over to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom he appointed governor of Judah.

Ezr 5:15 The emperor told him to take them and return them to the Temple in Jerusalem, and to rebuild the Temple where it had stood before.

Ezr 5:16 So Sheshbazzar came and laid its foundation; construction has continued from then until the present, but it is still not finished.'

Ezr 5:17 "Now, if it please Your Majesty, have a search made in the royal records in Babylon to find whether or not Emperor Cyrus gave orders for this Temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt, and then inform us what your will is in this matter."

Ezra 5:1-17

Ezra 5 - The Construction Is Resumed

A. God helps His people.

1. (1-2) God helps by sending prophets to move the work again.

Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them.

a. **Then the prophet Haggai:** The words of the Prophet Haggai to the community of returned exiles are found in

the Old Testament book that bears his name. The heart of his prophecy is communicated in Hag 1:2-10.

i. "The two prophets who now proclaimed their message in Jerusalem appeared at a time of deep depression. They were not borne on the crest of a wave or a religious revival, as its spokesmen to give it utterance." (Adeney)

ii. In Hag 1:2-10 we see that the prophet rebuked the people for their attitude towards the building of the temple. They said, "*The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.*" In saying this, the people made their excuse sound spiritual. They couldn't speak against the *idea* of building the temple, so they spoke against its *timing*. "It isn't God's timing to rebuild the temple."

iii. Therefore, the prophet rebuked them with pointed words: "*Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?*" The problem was simply wrongly ordered priorities. They were content to let the cause of the Lord suffer at the expense of their comfort. Instead, they should have felt no rest until the work of God was as prosperous as their personal lives, and been as willing to sacrifice for the work of God as they were for their personal comfort and luxury.

iv. Then God spoke to the people through the prophet: "*Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified.*" God called them to *work*. Sometimes God's cause needs *work*, work that is supported by prayer, not work that is neglected because of pretended "spiritual" service. The people had allowed a delay beyond their control to become a delay of their own choosing.

b. **And Zechariah the son of Iddo:** Some of Zechariah's prophecy is also recorded for us in the Book of Zechariah. Haggai's prophecy was a more direct encouragement to get busy on the work of building the temple; Zechariah's prophecy was more directed to the spiritual condition of the returned exiles.

i. The name **Zechariah** means "The LORD Remembers," and is a fitting name for a prophet of restoration. This prophet was called to encourage and mobilize God's people to accomplish a task that they began yet lost momentum in completing. He encouraged them indirectly by telling them about God's care for them and by keeping the presence of the Messiah very much in their minds. He worked with others, notably Haggai, Zerubbabel, and Ezra. He warned them of the consequences of neglecting God's work and he emphasized that God wants to do a work through His people.

ii. If all we had was Haggai to go by, we might conclude that all God was really interested in was the temple. Zechariah gives the rest of the story, and shows how God is interested in lives, not only buildings.

c. **And the prophets of God were with them, helping them:** The work of these prophets was effective, and helped the people properly re-order their priorities and to resume the building work on the temple (**rose up and began to build the house of God**). This verse also indicates that their work went beyond the directly prophetic, and that they took a hand in helping with the practical work of building.

i. Darius came to the throne in a time of conflict and struggle. Therefore the Jews in Jerusalem started their work "without receiving any permission from

him, and they did this when he was far too busy fighting for his throne to attend to the troubles of a small, distant city.” (Adeney)

2. (3-5) *God helps by protecting the work and allowing it to continue.*

At the same time Tattenai the governor of *the region beyond the River* and Shethar-Boznai and their companions came to them and spoke thus to them: "Who has commanded you to build this temple and finish this wall?" Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building. But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius. Then a written answer was returned concerning this *matter*.

a. **Tattenai the governor of the region beyond the River:** This was the man appointed by the King of Persia to govern the province that included Judea. He and his **companions** wanted to know why the work of building both the **temple** and the **wall** had resumed.

i. “There is a mention of *Tattenai’s* name (probably) and office (certainly) in a Babylonian record dated 502 b.c. which speaks of ‘Ta-at[-tan-ni] governor of Ebernari’ (*i.e.*, of *Beyond the River*).” (Kidner)

ii. “Like every spiritual advance, from Abraham’s to the missionary expansion in Acts, this venture began with a word from the Lord. And, in common with the rest, it was quickly tested and threatened.” (Kidner)

iii. Tattenai seems much more reasonable than the Samaritans who opposed the work some 15 years previous to this. This shows us that not all who oppose God’s work do it out of premeditated evil; some do it out of custom and a sense of duty.

b. Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men: This was recorded by Ezra to demonstrate that there was no hint of rebellion among the returned Jews. In no way were they trying to rebel against the authority of the Persian King.

c. But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease: God's blessing was upon them, so that the work - resumed under a response to the prophets of God - did not have to stop almost as soon as it started. The work continued, and this blessing was a confirmation of God's hand on His prophets.

i. "We are not to suppose for a moment that this was something new. That eye had always been upon them, but through the teaching of the prophets, and their rousing call, their consciousness of relationship to God had again been renewed." (Morgan)

ii. "The *eye of their God* upon them was showed through well enough to make any immediate action other than a report seem called for." (Kidner)

d. Till a report could go to Darius: This was good for two reasons. First, the nature of bureaucracy and the slow postal system meant that the work could continue for some time. Second, they could pray and trust that God would guide King Darius to a favorable decision.

i. "That he should accede to such a request rather than exercise his immediate authority one way or the other, was in itself somewhat remarkable." (Morgan)

B. The letter to King Darius.

1. (6) The address of the letter.

This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai sent: The governor of *the region* beyond the River, and Shethar-

Boznai, and his companions, the Persians who were in the region beyond the River, to Darius the king.

a. **A copy of the letter that Tattenai sent:** As a good administrator, Tattenai not only sent a letter to Darius, he also preserved **a copy** that made its way into Ezra's record.

2. (7-17) The message of the letter.

They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus; To Darius the king: All peace. Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judea, to the temple of the great God, which is being built with heavy stones, and timber is being laid in the walls; and this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands. Then we asked those elders, *and* spoke thus to them: "Who commanded you to build this temple and to finish these walls?" We also asked them their names to inform you, that we might write the names of the men who *were* chief among them. And thus they returned us an answer, saying: "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed. But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, *who* destroyed this temple and carried the people away to Babylon. However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of God. Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that *was* in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon; those King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor. And he

said to him, "Take these articles; go, carry them to the temple *site* that *is* in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its former site." Then the same Sheshbazzar came *and* laid the foundation of the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem; but from that time even until now it has been under construction, and it is not finished." Now therefore, if *it seems* good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which *is* there in Babylon, whether it is so that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send us his pleasure concerning this *matter*.

a. **Let it be known to the king:** In this letter, Tattenai seems to fairly recount the situation from his perspective. Without prejudice or malice, he explained the matter to King Darius.

i. "He seems to have been a mild and judicious man; and to have acted with great prudence and caution, and without any kind of *prejudice*. The manner in which he represented this to the king is a full proof of this disposition." (Clarke)

b. **Which is being built with heavy stones:** The **heavy stones** perhaps aroused suspicion in Tattenai; they made him wonder if the Jews were building a temple or a fortress.

i. **Timber is being laid in the walls:** "Courses of timber at intervals, between those of stone or brick, were quite a common constructional feature over a long period in the ancient Near East, and may have originated as a means of strengthening buildings against earthquakes." (Kidner)

c. **Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundation:** This leads many to believe that Sheshbazzar is actually another name for Zerubbabel, and that Tattenai used

this name because it would be more likely to appear in the records that were to be searched.

i. There are other ideas about the identity to Sheshbazzar. "Sheshbazzar may have been viewed as the official Persian 'governor' whereas Zerubbabel served as the popular leader. This may be why the Jews mentioned Sheshbazzar here when speaking to the Persian authorities." (Yamauchi)

d. **Let a search be made... whether it is so that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem:** Respectfully, Tattenai asked King Darius to research the matter, to determine if the rebuilding of temple and Jerusalem was royally sanctioned.

i. "Tattenai, who was now opposing them as they resumed the work, either did not believe that such a decree had ever been promulgated, or considered that it could not be found." (Morgan)

The Decree of Darius

Ezr 6:1 So Emperor Darius issued orders for a search to be made in the royal records that were kept in Babylon.

Ezr 6:2 But it was in the city of Ecbatana in the province of Media that a scroll was found, containing the following record:

Ezr 6:3 "In the first year of his reign Emperor Cyrus commanded that the Temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt as a place where sacrifices are made and offerings are burned. The Temple is to be ninety feet high and ninety feet wide.

Ezr 6:4 The walls are to be built with one layer of wood on top of each three layers of stone. All expenses are to be paid by the royal treasury.

Ezr 6:5 Also the gold and silver utensils which King Nebuchadnezzar brought to Babylon from the Temple in

Jerusalem are to be returned to their proper place in the Jerusalem Temple."

Ezr 6:6 Then Emperor Darius sent the following reply: "To Tattenai, governor of West-of-Euphrates, Shethar Bozenai, and your fellow officials in West-of-Euphrates. "Stay away from the Temple

Ezr 6:7 and do not interfere with its construction. Let the governor of Judah and the Jewish leaders rebuild the Temple of God where it stood before.

Ezr 6:8 I hereby command you to help them rebuild it. Their expenses are to be paid promptly out of the royal funds received from taxes in West-of-Euphrates, so that the work is not interrupted.

Ezr 6:9 Day by day, without fail, you are to give the priests in Jerusalem whatever they tell you they need: young bulls, sheep, or lambs to be burned as offerings to the God of Heaven, or wheat, salt, wine, or olive oil.

Ezr 6:10 This is to be done so that they can offer sacrifices that are acceptable to the God of Heaven and pray for his blessing on me and my sons.

Ezr 6:11 I further command that if any disobey this order, a wooden beam is to be torn out of their houses, sharpened on one end, and then driven through their bodies. And their houses are to be made a rubbish heap.

Ezr 6:12 May the God who chose Jerusalem as the place where he is to be worshiped overthrow any king or nation that defies this command and tries to destroy the Temple there. I, Darius, have commanded. My command is to be fully obeyed."

The Temple Finished and Dedicated

Ezr 6:13 Then Governor Tattenai, Shethar Bozenai, and their fellow officials did exactly as the emperor had commanded.

Ezr 6:14 The Jewish leaders made good progress with the building of the Temple, encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. They completed the Temple as they had been commanded by the God of Israel and by Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, emperors of Persia.

Ezr 6:15 They finished the Temple on the third day of the month Adar in the sixth year of the reign of Emperor Darius.

Ezr 6:16 Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites, and all the others who had returned from exile—joyfully dedicated the Temple.

Ezr 6:17 For the dedication they offered 100 bulls, 200 sheep, and 400 lambs as sacrifices, and 12 goats as offerings for sin, one for each tribe of Israel.

Ezr 6:18 They also organized the priests and the Levites for the Temple services in Jerusalem, according to the instructions contained in the book of Moses.

Passover Celebrated

Ezr 6:19 The people who had returned from exile celebrated Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month of the following year.

Ezr 6:20 All the priests and the Levites had purified themselves and were ritually clean. The Levites killed the animals for the Passover sacrifices for all the people who had returned, for the priests, and for themselves.

Ezr 6:21 The sacrifices were eaten by all the Israelites who had returned from exile and by all those who had given up the pagan ways of the other people who were living in the land and who had come to worship the LORD God of Israel.

Ezr 6:22 For seven days they joyfully celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread. They were full of joy because the LORD had made the emperor of Assyria favorable to them, so that he supported them in their work of rebuilding the Temple of the God of Israel.

Ezra 6:1-22

Ezra 6 - The Second Temple Is Completed

A. Darius responds to the request of the governor Tattenai.

1. (1-2) *A diligent search for the decree of Cyrus.*

Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. And at Achmetha, in the palace that *is* in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record *was* written thus:

a. **Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made:** This was the response to the respectful request made by Tattenai described in the last part of Ezra 5.

b. **At Achmetha... a scroll was found:** This indicates that there must have been some diligence required in the search. This in itself was an evidence of God's hand in the matter; otherwise, they might have easily given up the search.

i. "It is easy to realize how easily this might not have been found. If such a document was not in the proper libraries, what more natural than to abandon the search? But under the Divine compulsion that search was prosecuted until the decree was found." (Morgan)

ii. This request was initiated in Judea, referred to Babylon, and the answer was found in records from the remote city of **Achmetha**. All this gave the builders lots of time to continue their work, because they did not stop through the inquiry process (Ezr 5:5).

iii. "Diodorus (2.32.4) declared that the Persians had 'royal parchments' recording their history. Persian

officials wrote on scrolls of papyrus and leather, as discoveries made in Egypt show.” (Yamauchi)

iv. “In ‘The Decrees of Cyrus’ (p. 89), de Vaux observes that ‘now we know that it was the custom of the Persian sovereigns to winter in Babylon and depart in the summer to Susa or Ecbatana,... and we also know that Cyrus left Babylon in the spring of 538 b.c... A forger operating in Palestine without the information which we possess could hardly have been so accurate.” (Yamauchi)

2. (3-5) *The text of the record found: Cyrus’ decree.*

In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree *concerning* the house of God at Jerusalem: "Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits *and* its width sixty cubits, *with* three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber. Let the expenses be paid from the king's treasury. Also let the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which *is* in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple which *is* in Jerusalem, *each* to its place; and deposit *them* in the house of God";

a. **King Cyrus issued a decree:** This is the decree originally recorded in Ezra 1, giving the Jewish people who wanted to return to Jerusalem and Judea the right to return and to repopulate Judea and to rebuild Jerusalem.

b. **Let the house be rebuilt... Let the expenses be paid from the king’s treasury:** Not only did Cyrus give *permission* for the temple to be rebuilt, he commanded the *funding* of the work from the royal **treasury**.

i. **Heavy stones:** “The *great stones* which had excited suspicion were now found to be expressly authorized - for the term is the same as for the ‘huge stones’ of 5:8 - literally, stones for rolling, too massive to be transported by other means” (Kidner).

ii. **Heavy stones and one row of new timber:** This construction technique seems to have been a precaution against earthquakes. “Kenyon has identified as the only visible remains of Zerubbabel’s building a straight joint of stones with heavy bosses about 108 feet north of the southeast corner of the temple platform, which Dunand confirmed as similar to Persian masonry found in Phoenicia” (Yamauchi).

iii. There is some question about the *size* of the temple as mentioned here, because these dimensions are greater than even Solomon’s temple. The best answer is that Cyrus gave the *limits* of what they could build, instead of the actual dimensions of the new structure. “He did not command them to make it so large, for he left the ordering of the proportions of the building to their skill and choice; but he restrained them that they should make it no larger, lest they should hereafter make use of it to other purposes against himself” (Poole).

c. **Let the gold and silver articles of the house of God... be restored and taken back to the temple which is in Jerusalem:** Furthermore, Cyrus ordered that the spoils taken from the temple *some two generations before* now be returned to the Jerusalem temple.

i. It was a remarkable example of God’s providence that so many of these **gold and silver articles of the house of God** still existed intact and that King Cyrus commanded them to be returned.

3. (6-12) *The reply of Darius to Tattenai.*

Now *therefore*, Tattenai, governor of *the region* beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and your companions the Persians who *are* beyond the River, keep yourselves far from there. Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site. Moreover I issue a decree *as to* what you shall do for the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: Let the cost be paid at the king's expense from taxes *on the region* beyond the River; this is to be given immediately to these men, so that they are not hindered. And whatever they need; young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who *are* in Jerusalem; let it be given them day by day without fail, that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons. Also I issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it; and let his house be made a refuse heap because of this. And may the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done diligently.

- a. **Let the work of this house of God alone:** Based on the search and recovery of the relevant document from King Cyrus, Darius made the appropriate command to **Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River.** Darius commanded him to allow the work on the temple and the city of Jerusalem to continue without interruption.

b. **Build the house of God on its site:** Darius recognized what the **elders of the Jews** recognized, that it was essential to build the temple upon its old foundations.

c. **Let the cost be paid at the king's expense:** Based on the prior decree from Cyrus, King Darius did more than *allow* the work to continue. He commanded that it be *funded* by local **taxes on the region beyond the River**. Darius did what is common for politicians to do; he put the burden for funding this work on the province itself, not from his own treasury.

i. And it was funded in an impressive manner: **whatever they need and let it be given to them day by day without fail** mean that this was a substantial grant.

ii. In this, we see the wonderful hand of God at work with the objections raised by Tattenai and Shethar-Bozenai as recorded in Ezr 5:3. The end result of these objections was to *further* the work of God instead of hindering it. This is an example of God working all things together for good for His people (Rom 8:28). On this point, Kidner quotes a line from a William Cowper poem: *The clouds which ye so much dread, Are big with mercy*.

d. **And pray for the life of the king and his sons:** This explains part of the motivation of King Darius. Not only did he base his decision on the precedent of King Cyrus, but he also wanted the prayers of the Jewish people for **the king and his sons**.

e. **Let him be hanged on it... let his house be made a refuse heap... destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it:** Finally, Darius was careful to make the decree *strong*, with severe punishments

against those who violated both the letter and the spirit of the decree.

i. There is some debate as to if this punishment involved flogging a man at his own house, hanging him to death at his house, or impaling him at his house as an early form of crucifixion. "Whether this refers to the punishment of hanging and gibbeting, of whipping at a post, or of empaling, is not quite clear... Empaling, thrusting a sharp stake through the body till it comes out at the side of the neck, or hanging, seems to be intended here." (Clarke)

ii. Darius was the type of man to see such brutal executions through to completion. "According to Herodotus (3.159) Darius I impaled three thousand Babylonians when he took Babylon, an act that Darius himself recorded in the Beshitun Inscription." (Yamauchi)

f. **Let it be done diligently:** At the end of it all, the king of the mightiest empire on the earth commanded that the temple be finished by the returned exiles and funded by the empire.

i. This might seem absolutely unique, but there is good evidence that Persian monarchs had similar concern for the conquered temples in other regions of their empire. "In 1973 French archaeologists discovered at Xanthos in Lycia in southwestern Turkey a cult foundation charter - written in Greek, Lycian, and Aramaic - dated to 358 b.c., a period when the area was controlled by a Persian satrap, that provided some striking parallels with the decree of Cyrus." (Yamauchi)

ii. "One can easily imagine with what surprise Tattenai received the answer of Darius, characterized by clearness and determination. The man who would

have hindered and stayed the progress of the building, was compelled not only to hinder, but to help with great gifts." (Morgan)

iii. "If certain matters can only be settled by reference to great men, kings or men of affairs, make the application;' and then betake yourself to prayer, believing that as He inclined the heart of Darius, in the instance before us, so He can do as He will among the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of earth." (Meyer)

iv. This is a powerful illustration of the principle from Proverbs: *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.* (Pro 21:1)

B. The temple is finished and dedicated.

1. (13-15) The temple is completed.

Then Tattenai, governor of *the region* beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent. So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished *it*, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

a. **Diligently did according to what King Darius had sent:** They were diligent in supporting and funding the work of rebuilding the temple and were diligent in punishing anyone who opposed it.

i. "The political motives for this forthrightness may have been many, including a desire to show respect for the policies of Cyrus and to promote stability in a part of the empire which was important for communications with Egypt, at a time when widespread unrest had only recently been quelled." (Kidner)

b. They prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the Prophet and Zechariah: The words and personal ministry of these post-exilic prophets was an important component in the success of the work. The work and the workers were genuinely strengthened by the word of God through these prophets.

i. The initial ministry of these prophets is mentioned in Ezr 5:1-2. There, the prophets had to encourage the people of God to resume the work after a significant period of inactivity. Now they had to encourage them to keep working when God had opened the doors for the work to be done. Even with the open doors, the work was still difficult and needed prophetic encouragement. God's blessing on the work did not make the work *easy* to do.

ii. "Work on the temple made little progress because of opposition and the preoccupation of returnees with their own homes (Hag 1:2-3). Because they had placed their own interests first, God sent them famine as a judgment (Hag 1:5-6; Hag 1:10-11). Spurred by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, and under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, a new effort was begun (Hag 1:12-15)."

 (Yamauchi)

c. The temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year: This means that it took four years from the resumption of

construction. It was such a big job that even with all doing the work **diligently** it was not quickly completed.

i. "The mention of Artaxerxes, who belongs to the next century, takes us forward to the restoration of the city walls by Nehemiah, which this king authorized. His name, as the third royal patron of Israel's rehabilitation, is added here to complete the picture, whether by the author or by an early scribe." (Kidner)

2. (16-18) The dedication ceremony of the second temple.

Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.

a. **Celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy:** There was a previous celebration, many years before at the founding of this second temple (Ezra 3). This was the celebration for the finishing of a functioning temple.

i. "The word for *dedication* (*hanukka*) was later to become the name of a festival in memory of the Temple's re-consecration in 165 b.c. after its profanation by Antiochus Epiphanes (*cf. Joh 10:22 f.*)" (Kidner)

b. **And they offered sacrifices:** Compared to the dedication of Solomon's temple (1Ki 8:62-66), this was a

meager dedication celebration. Solomon sacrificed some 142,000 animals at his dedication of the temple; here at the dedication of the second temple they only sacrificed a total of 712 animals.

i. However, given the relative wealth of Israel in the days of the first temple as compared to the second temple, the smaller gift recorded in Ezra may have been more beautiful to God.

ii. **As a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats:** "It was a confession of failure but also faith. There was still atonement and still the covenant with the whole people - for this was the implication of the *twelve* sacrifices." (Kidner)

iii. The fact that sacrifice was made for the *twelve tribes* shows that regathered Israel had the real sense that they were the collective product of all twelve tribes, and there were not ten or any other number of "lost" tribes.

c. **They assigned the priests to their divisions... as it is written in the Book of Moses:** They took care to resume the proper priestly service as commanded by the **Book of Moses** and previous pattern of David.

i. Yet, *all* was not the same as in the previous service in the days of Solomon's temple. "The general plan of the second temple resembled the first. But the [Most Holy Place] was left empty as the ark of the covenant had been lost through the Babylonian conquest... [The Holy Place] was furnished with a table for showbread, the incense altar, and one menorah instead of Solomon's ten" (Yamauchi).

3. (19-22) *The first Passover celebrated in the second temple.*

And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth *day* of the first month. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them *were ritually* clean. And they slaughtered the Passover *lambs* for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel. And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the LORD made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

a. The descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month:

This shows that they were careful to keep the Passover according to the command of Moses, on the proper day. In keeping Passover they remembered the central act of redemption of the Old Testament, the deliverance of God's people from Egypt.

b. They slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the descendants of the captivity: In this, we see that the people themselves did not sacrifice the **Passover lambs**, rather the priests did this for them. It seems that there was no absolute custom for this; sometimes the people sacrificed the Passover lambs under the supervision of the priests and sometimes the priests did it for the people.

c. With all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land: Connected with the remembrance of deliverance of Passover was the **Feast**

of Unleavened Bread, which marked the purity of God's delivered people.

i. **The children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel:** "This is a crucial verse for correcting the impression one might gain from Ezr 4:1-3 of a bitterly exclusive party... in reality we find that only the self-excluded were unwelcome. The convert found an open door, as Rahab and Ruth had done." (Kidner)

ii. "We may suspect a spirit of Jewish animosity in the ugly phrase 'the filthiness of the heathen.' But it was only too true that both the Canaanite and the Babylonian habits of life were disgustingly immoral. The same horrible characteristic is found among most of the heathen to-day. These degraded people are not simply benighted in theological error; they are corrupted by horrible vices. Missionary work is more than the propagation of Christian theology; it is the purging of Augean stables." (Adeney)

d. **The LORD made them joyful:** In the context of obedience and purity, they did not lose their joy. The purity of God's delivered people was *joyful* in its character (instead of dour). It also led them **to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God.**

i. "Do not be afraid of joy; when God makes you joyful, do not think it necessary to restrain your songs or smiles." (Meyer)

ii. "So ends the first stage, a generation long, of Israel's rehabilitation. It has opened when the Lord 'stirred up the spirit of Cyrus (Ezr 1:1), and it

concluded with His turning the heart of one of that king's most powerful successors." (Kidner)

iii. **The heart of the king of Assyria:** "He had 'turned the heart of the king of Assyria' - a title for Darius that speaks for the authenticity of the narrative, for it represents an old form of speech for the ruler of the districts that had once belonged to the king of Assyria." (Adeney)

Ezra Sent to Teach the People

Ezr 7:1 Many years later, when Artaxerxes was emperor of Persia, there was a man named Ezra. He traced his ancestors back to Aaron, the High Priest, as follows: Ezra was the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah,

Ezr 7:2 son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub,

Ezr 7:3 son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth,

Ezr 7:4 son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki,

Ezr 7:5 son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron.

Ezr 7:6 (6-7) Ezra was a scholar with a thorough knowledge of the Law which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given to Moses. Because Ezra had the blessing of the LORD his God, the emperor gave him everything he asked for. In the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes, Ezra set out from Babylonia for Jerusalem with a group of Israelites which included priests, Levites, Temple musicians, Temple guards, and workers.

Ezr 7:8 (8-9) They left Babylonia on the first day of the first month, and with God's help they arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month.

Ezr 7:10 Ezra had devoted his life to studying the Law of the LORD, to practicing it, and to teaching all its laws and regulations to the people of Israel.

Ezr 7:11 Emperor Artaxerxes gave the following document to Ezra, the priest and scholar, who had a thorough knowledge of the laws and commands which the LORD had given to Israel:

Ezr 7:12 "From Emperor Artaxerxes to the priest Ezra, scholar in the Law of the God of Heaven.

Ezr 7:13 "I command that throughout my empire all the Israelite people, priests, and Levites that so desire be permitted to go with you to Jerusalem.

Ezr 7:14 I, together with my seven counselors, send you to investigate the conditions in Jerusalem and Judah in order to see how well the Law of your God, which has been entrusted to you, is being obeyed.

Ezr 7:15 You are to take with you the gold and silver offerings which I and my counselors desire to give to the God of Israel, whose Temple is in Jerusalem.

Ezr 7:16 You are also to take all the silver and gold which you collect throughout the province of Babylon and the offerings which the Israelite people and their priests give for the Temple of their God in Jerusalem.

Ezr 7:17 "You are to spend this money carefully and buy bulls, rams, lambs, grain, and wine and offer them on the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Ezr 7:18 You may use the silver and gold that is left over for whatever you and your people desire, in accordance with the will of your God.

Ezr 7:19 You are to present to God in Jerusalem all the utensils that have been given to you for use in the Temple services.

Ezr 7:20 And anything else which you need for the Temple, you may get from the royal treasury.

Ezr 7:21 "I command all the treasury officials in West-of-Euphrates Province to provide promptly for Ezra, the priest

and scholar in the Law of the God of Heaven, everything he asks you for,

Ezr 7:22 up to a limit of 7,500 pounds of silver, 500 bushels of wheat, 550 gallons of wine, 550 gallons of olive oil, and as much salt as needed.

Ezr 7:23 You must be careful to provide everything which the God of Heaven requires for his Temple, and so make sure that he is never angry with me or with those who reign after me.

Ezr 7:24 You are forbidden to collect any taxes from the priests, Levites, musicians, guards, workers, or anyone else connected with this Temple.

Ezr 7:25 "You, Ezra, using the wisdom which your God has given you, are to appoint administrators and judges to govern all the people in West-of-Euphrates who live by the Law of your God. You must teach that Law to anyone who does not know it.

Ezr 7:26 If any disobey the laws of your God or the laws of the empire, they are to be punished promptly: by death or by exile or by confiscation of their property or by imprisonment."

Ezr 7:27 Ezra said, "Praise the LORD, the God of our ancestors! He has made the emperor willing to honor in this way the Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem.

Ezr 7:28 By God's grace I have won the favor of the emperor, of his counselors, and of all his powerful officials; the LORD my God has given me courage, and I have been able to persuade many of the heads of the clans of Israel to return with me."

Ezra 7:1-28

Ezra 7 - Ezra's Return from Babylon

"At Jerusalem, Malachi may well have prophesied shortly before the coming of Ezra, giving us, if so, a sharp taste of

the mood and temper of the times which occupy our chapters 7-10.” (Kidner)

A. An overview of Ezra’s return.

1. (1-5) The genealogy of Ezra the Scribe.

Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest;

a. **Now after these things:** Some 60 largely uneventful years passed between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7. The ruler of Persia at the end of that period was **Artaxerxes**, who is also known to history as Artaxerxes Longimanus, the successor to Xerxes, the king who married Esther. the events of the Book of Esther took place between Ezra 6, 7.

i. “There can be no reasonable doubt that his reference is to the son and successor of Xerxes - known by the Greeks as ‘Macrocheir,’ and by the Romans as ‘Longimanus’ - Artaxerxes ‘of the long hand,’ for this Artaxerxes alone enjoyed a sufficiently extended reign to include both the commencement of Ezra’s public work and the later scenes in the life of Nehemiah which the chronicler associates with the same king.” (Adeney)

ii. “If this was Artaxerxes I as the traditional view maintains, which we believe is correct, Ezra arrived in Palestine in 458 (457)... The traditional view assumes a gap of almost sixty years between the events of chapter 6 and chapter 7.” (Yamauchi)

b. **Son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah... the son of Aaron the chief priest:** This list is not all inclusive (there are some generations left out). Nevertheless, it shows that Ezra was a descendant both of **Aaron** and also of **Seraiah**, who was the last High Priest before the captivity.

i. “‘Zadok’ was a priest under David whom Solomon appointed chief priest in place of Abiathar, who supported the rebel Adonijah (1Ki 1:7-8; 1Ki 2:35). Ezekiel regarded the Zadokites as free from idolatry (Eze 44:15-16). Zadokites held the office of high priest till 171 b.c. The Sadducees were named after Zadok, and the Qumran community looked for the restoration of the Zadokite priesthood.” (Yamauchi)

2. (6) *Ezra, a skilled scribe.*

This Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

a. **This Ezra came up from Babylon:** Ezra was one of the *later* Jews who returned from the captivity to Judea and Jerusalem. Though there was a first great return (described in Ezra 1-2), there were also many others who returned in the years following.

i. “His name stands very high in Jewish tradition, where he came to be regarded as a second Moses, and indeed it was he, more than any other man, who stamped Israel with its lasting character as the people of a book.” (Kidner)

b. **A skilled scribe in the Law of Moses:** To us a **scribe** sounds like a glorified secretary, someone who simply writes. That is not the idea of this description of Ezra. For the Jewish culture of that day, **a skilled scribe**

was an *expert* in the Law of Moses, someone who was like a highly trained lawyer in the word of God.

i. "In his case it is emphasized by the word *skilled*, or literally 'rapid' (*cf. Psa 45:1*) - suggesting a quickness of grasp and ease of movement amid this complex material which was the fruit of the devoted study described in verse 10." (Kidner)

ii. Scribes were important and influential, and one might say that they had three main duties: to *preserve* the Word of God, to *teach* the Word of God, and to *administrate* the Word of God (in the sense of interpreting and applying it).

iii. By the time of Jesus there were many scribes and they were respected as lawyers of the law of God among most of the Jews of that time. However, they had degenerated greatly from the ideal originally established by Ezra, so much so that they were active opponents of Jesus and His ministry and targets of His rebukes (*Mat 7:29*; Matthew 23).

iv. "As messengers of the will of God, they took the place of the prophets, with this difference: instead of receiving new revelations, they explained and applied the old. Of this new order, Ezra was at once the founder and type." (Morgan)

v. With critical theories in fashion since the enlightenment it became popular to say that Ezra, or others in his day, actually first compiled the Pentateuch (or more) from various written and oral traditions they gathered. Yet this verse alone (**which the LORD God of Israel had given**) shows this is wrong. As Derek Kidner observed, "Incidentally the present verse shares none of the doubts of some modern criticism over the antiquity (*Moses*) or the authority (*the Lord*) of the law, nor does it see Ezra

as a reviser or compiler. He is concerned with it as something *given*."

c. **The king granted him all his request:** Again, the favor of God towards Jerusalem and the Jewish people is again evident. The great generosity of the king was because **the hand of the LORD his God was upon him.**

3. (7-10) Ezra's arrival to Jerusalem and his mission.

Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

a. **And Ezra came to Jerusalem:** Ezra came to a city that had been repopulated by the Jewish people from their exile for about 60 years.

i. "Though the direct distance between Babylon and Jerusalem is about five hundred miles, the travelers would have had to traverse nine hundred miles, going northwest along the Euphrates River and then south." (Yamauchi)

ii. **Some of the children of Israel:** "And but some; for many chose rather to continue in the land of their captivity, though God by his prophets, and the king by his proclamation, had cried out, 'Ho, ho, come forth' [and so forth]. 'Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon,' Zec 2:6-7." (Trapp)

b. According to the good hand of his God upon him:

Ezra credited his successful journey (lasting four months) to God's **good hand** of blessing on him.

i. "This little summary of the expedition gives no hint of the initial disappointment and delay, the fasting and prayer, and the dangers of such a journey, which will emerge in the full account." (Kidner)

c. Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach: We see here a threefold intention in Ezra. He came to **seek**, to **do**, and to **teach** God's word.

i. **Had prepared his heart:** "An instrument must be turned ere it can be played upon; sour wines need good sweetening." (Trapp)

ii. We may say that this threefold intention is essential in anyone who wants to make an impact on others with the word of God.

- First, to **seek the Law of the LORD**. This means that full impact with God's word is made by those who diligently **seek** after His word and fellowship with God in His word.

- Second, **to do it**. This means that full impact with God's word is made by those who are not only hearers of the word, but actual *doers* of the word. It has to be lived, not only known.

- Third, **to teach**. This means that full impact with God's word is made by those who actually **teach** it to others. What has been learned in the seeking and the doing must be put into effect through the *teaching* of God's word.

iii. "Here is a fine character of a minister of God: He *prepares*, he fixes, purposes, and determines, *with his heart* - with all his powers and affections, to *seek the*

law of God, and to do it himself, that he may be properly qualified to teach its statutes and judgments to Israel.” (Clarke)

iv. The Living Bible translates Ezr 7:10 as so: *Ezra had determined to study and obey the laws of the Lord and to become a Bible teacher, teaching those laws to the people of Israel.*

B. The letter of Artaxerxes.

1. (11-16) The king commissions helpers, a copy of the Law, and gifts for the temple to go with Ezra upon his return to Jerusalem.

This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of His statutes to Israel: Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven: Perfect peace, and so forth. I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which *is* in your hand; and *whereas you are* to carry the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling *is* in Jerusalem; and *whereas* all the silver and gold that you may find in all the province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests, *are to be* freely offered for the house of their God in Jerusalem;

a. **Ezra the priest, the scribe, the expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD:** Ezra was indeed more than a glorified secretary or copyist. He was a well-trained **expert** in the Word of God.

b. **Whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem:** This tells us that not only did Ezra *go* to Jerusalem, he was actually **sent** by Artaxerxes to gather information for the

king and his seven counselors.

c. **Who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem:** With this, Artaxerxes hoped to encourage others to go with Ezra to increase the chance of his success and to strengthen the province of Judah.

d. **You are to carry the silver and gold:** Artaxerxes also authorized the giving of many **silver and gold** gifts to the temple, **along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests.**

i. "*The vessels* may have been some which had been overlooked when the captured vessels were restored by Cyrus (1:7ff), but it is just as likely that they were a goodwill gift, newly presented." (Kidner)

2. (17-22) *Providing for the temple and sacrificial expenses.*

Now therefore, be careful to buy with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God. Also the articles that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. And whatever more may be needed for the house of your God, which you may have occasion to provide, pay *for it* from the king's treasury. And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who *are in the region* beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the

priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently, up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribed limit.

a. **Be careful to buy with this money:** Ezra carried with him government money that was meant to advance the interests of Artaxerxes. This money was to be spent on sacrificial animals and the promotion of temple worship at the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

b. **Whatever seems good to you:** Ezra was commanded to **be careful**, but also given latitude to make his own decisions about how to best spend the money he came with.

c. **Whatever more may be needed for the house of your God... pay for it from the king's treasury:** Artaxerxes was very generous to Ezra and the work in Jerusalem, allowing him to draw on **the king's treasury** for whatever he needed.

i. "A 'talent' in the Babylonian sexagesimal system was 60 minas, with a mina being 60 shekels. A talent weighed about 75 pounds. A hundred talents was an enormous sum, about 3¾ tons of silver. This amount, together with a talent of gold, was the tribute that Pharaoh Neco imposed on Judah (2Ki 23:33)."
(Yamauchi)

3. (23) The motive of Artaxerxes.

Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

a. **Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done:** In all this, we see that

Artaxerxes went to great lengths to promote the operations of the temple in Jerusalem.

i. "Without shucking and hucking, without delays and consults." (Trapp)

b. **For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?** This shows the *motive* of Artaxerxes. Like other monarchs of the Persian Empire, he wanted to placate the gods of the people and the territory that they had conquered. He believed it was good and safe policy for his kingdom to do this.

4. (24-26) *Ezra is given legal power to enforce God's Law.*

Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God. And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them. Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.

a. **It shall not be lawful to impose tax:** To promote the work of the temple in Jerusalem, Artaxerxes commanded that **priests** and other workers at the temple be given tax-exempt status.

i. "Darius had ordered a similar exemption for cult-servants of Apollo." (Kidner)

b. **Set magistrates and judges:** Artaxerxes gave Ezra significant authority in the civil administration of the province (**the region beyond the River**).

i. **According to your God-given wisdom:** "*The wisdom of thy God that is in thine hand, i.e. which God hath put into thy heart, and which appears in the works of thy hand. Wisdom is sometimes ascribed to the hands, as Psa 78:72.*"

c. **Teach those who do not know:** Artaxerxes gave Ezra authority to teach this generation of returned exiles. Yet he also gave authority - perhaps *too much* authority - to punish those who **did not observe the law of your God and the law of the king**.

i. "Later passages show that Ezra was primarily a priest and scholar rather than an administrator. Yet the assurance that God had called him and had opened the doors gave Ezra the courage and strength to undertake this great task." (Yamauchi)

5. (27-28) *Ezra gives thanks.*

Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who has put *such a thing* as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem, and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes. So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God *was* upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me.

a. **Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers:** Ezra knew that such generous and broad support and authority could only be granted by God who **put such a thing as this in the king's heart**.

i. As God had moved the heart of Darius (Ezr 6:1-12), we see that God also moved the heart of Artaxerxes. Truly, *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.* (Pro 21:1)

b. **So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me:** Ezra was certainly **encouraged**; not so by the king's support but more so because it was all clear evidence of God's support and blessing. Ezra found great encouragement in knowing that **the hand of the LORD** was **upon** him.

Genealogy of Those Who Returned with Ezra

Ezr 8:1 This is the list of the heads of the clans who had been in exile in Babylonia and who returned with Ezra to Jerusalem when Artaxerxes was emperor:

Ezr 8:2 (2-14)

- Gershom, of the clan of Phinehas
- Daniel, of the clan of Ithamar
- Hattush son of Shecaniah, of the clan of David
- Zechariah, of the clan of Parosh, with 150 men of his clan (there were records of their family lines)
- Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah, of the clan of Pahath Moab, with 200 men
- Shecaniah son of Jahaziel, of the clan of Zattu, with 300 men
- Ebed son of Jonathan, of the clan of Adin, with 50 men
- Jeshaiiah son of Athaliah, of the clan of Elam, with 70 men
- Zebadiah son of Michael, of the clan of Shephatiah, with 80 men
- Obadiah son of Jehiel, of the clan of Joab, with 218 men
- Shelomith son of Josiphiah, of the clan of Bani, with 160 men
- Zechariah son of Bebai, of the clan of Bebai, with 28 men
- Johanan son of Hakkatan, of the clan of Azgad, with 110 men
- Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, of the clan of Adonikam, with 60 men (they returned at a later date)

- Uthai and Zaccur, of the clan of Bigvai, with 70 men

Ezra Sends for Levites

Ezr 8:15 I assembled the entire group by the canal that runs to the town of Ahava, and we camped there three days. I found that there were priests in the group, but no Levites.

Ezr 8:16 I sent for nine of the leaders: Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, and for two teachers, Joiarib and Elnathan.

Ezr 8:17 I sent them to Iddo, head of the community at Casiphia, to ask him and his associates, the Temple workers, to send us people to serve God in the Temple.

Ezr 8:18 Through God's grace they sent us Sherebiah, an able man, a Levite from the clan of Mahli; and eighteen of his sons and brothers came with him.

Ezr 8:19 They also sent Hashabiah and Jeshaiiah of the clan of Merari, with twenty of their relatives.

Ezr 8:20 In addition there were 220 Temple workers whose ancestors had been designated by King David and his officials to assist the Levites. They were all listed by name.

Fasting and Prayer for Protection

Ezr 8:21 There by the Ahava Canal I gave orders for us all to fast and humble ourselves before our God and to ask him to lead us on our journey and protect us and our children and all our possessions.

Ezr 8:22 I would have been ashamed to ask the emperor for a troop of cavalry to guard us from any enemies during our journey, because I had told him that our God blesses everyone who trusts him, but that he is displeased with and punishes anyone who turns away from him.

Ezr 8:23 So we fasted and prayed for God to protect us, and he answered our prayers.

Priests to Guard Offerings

Ezr 8:24 From among the leading priests I chose Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten others.

Ezr 8:25 Then I weighed out the silver, the gold, and the utensils which the emperor, his advisers and officials, and the people of Israel had given to be used in the Temple, and I gave it to the priests.

Ezr 8:26 (26-27) This is what I gave them:

- silver - 25 tons
- 100 silver utensils - 150 pounds
- gold - 7,500 pounds
- 20 gold bowls - 270 ounces
- fine bronze bowls, equal in value to gold bowls

Ezr 8:28 I said to them, "You are sacred to the LORD, the God of your ancestors, and so are all the silver and gold utensils brought to him as freewill offerings.

Ezr 8:29 Guard them carefully until you reach the Temple. There in the priests' rooms weigh them and turn them over to the leaders of the priests and of the Levites, and to the leaders of the people of Israel in Jerusalem."

Ezr 8:30 So the priests and the Levites took charge of the silver, the gold, and the utensils, to take them to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Ezr 8:31 It was on the twelfth day of the first month that we left the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. Our God was with us and protected us from enemy attacks and from ambush as we traveled.

Ezr 8:32 When we reached Jerusalem, we rested three days.

Ezr 8:33 Then on the fourth day we went to the Temple, weighed the silver, the gold, and the utensils, and turned them over to Meremoth the priest, son of Uriah. With him

were Eleazar son of Phinehas and two Levites, Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui.

Ezr 8:34 Everything was counted and weighed, and a complete record was made at the same time.

Ezr 8:35 All those who had returned from exile then brought offerings to be burned as sacrifices to the God of Israel. They offered 12 bulls for all Israel, 96 rams, and 77 lambs; they also offered 12 goats to purify themselves from sin. All these animals were burned as sacrifices to the LORD.

Ezr 8:36 They also took the document the emperor had given them and gave it to the governors and officials of West-of-Euphrates Province, who then gave their support to the people and the Temple worship.

Ezra 8:1-36

Ezra 8 - Ezra Comes to Jerusalem

A. The people who came with Ezra to Jerusalem.

1. (1-14) A list of the families.

These *are* the heads of their fathers' houses, and *this is* the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of King Artaxerxes: of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom; of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel; of the sons of David, Hattush; of the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah; and registered with him were one hundred and fifty males; of the sons of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah, and with him two hundred males; of the sons of Shechaniah, Ben-Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males; of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males; of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males; of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him eighty males; of the

sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males; of the sons of Shelomith, Ben-Josiphiah, and with him one hundred and sixty males; of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty-eight males; of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him one hundred and ten males; of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names *are* these; Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah; and with them sixty males; also of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud, and with them seventy males.

a. **These are the heads of their father's houses:** This list includes those who **went up with Ezra from Babylon**. Here Ezra begins to re-tell the account that was summarized in Ezr 7:1-10.

i. "There was little at Jerusalem to attract a new expedition; for the glamour which had surrounded the first return, with a son of David at its head, had faded in grievous disappointments; and the second series of pilgrims had to carry with them the torch with which to rekindle the flames of devotion." (Adeney)

b. **Of the sons of Phinehas, Gerhsom... Ithamar, Daniel... David, Hattush:** These seem to be prominent members of the entourage, coming from prominent families.

i. "The interest of this forbidding list of names and numbers lies in the fact that in every case but one of these groups are joining, at long last, the descendants of the pioneers from Babylon eighty years before." (Kidner)

ii. **Shechaniah:** "There were three of this name; the second is mentioned in Ezr 8:5, and the third Ezr 10:2. They were all different persons, as may be seen from their fathers' houses" (Clarke).

c. **And with him two hundred males... three hundred males:** Adding the counts of the male members of the group together, there was a total count of at least 1,496 men in the group. Adding an estimated number of women and children (Ezr 8:21), we can surmise that the total number of the party coming with Ezra in the days of **King Artaxerxes** was something like between 6,000 to 7,000 people.

i. "The whole company consisted of one thousand four hundred ninety and six males: a good addition to those that went up before with Zerubbabel; yet nothing so many as might have been, but that they wanted hearts." (Trapp)

2. (15) *The lack of Levites in the group.*

Now I gathered them by the river that flows to Ahava, and we camped there three days. And I looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there.

a. **Now I gathered them by the river:** Ezra was definitely the leader of this group, and in more than a spiritual sense. He led the expedition.

b. **And found none of the sons of Levi there:** The Levites were different from the priests, being the larger tribe from which the family of priests (the descendants of Aaron). These were the essential workers for the system of temple worship that Ezra was to promote.

i. Perhaps the Levites were generally too comfortable with their lives in Babylon to go back to Jerusalem. Perhaps they were not willing to come back to their ancestral temple duties that put them under the authority of the priests. Whatever the reason was, Ezra had the money and the authority he needed, but not the *men*.

ii. "A rabbinic midrash on Psalms 137 relates the legend that there were Levites in the caravan but that they were not qualified to officiate because when Nebuchadnezzar had ordered them to sing for him the songs of Zion, 'they refused and bit off the ends of their fingers, so that they could not play on the harps.'" (Yamauchi)

3. (16-20) Ezra addresses the problem of a lack of Levites.

Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leaders; also for Joiarib and Elnathan, men of understanding. And I gave them a command for Iddo the chief man at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say to Iddo *and* his brethren the Nethinim at the place Casiphia; that they should bring us servants for the house of our God. Then, by the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, with his sons and brothers, eighteen men; and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, twenty men; also of the Nethinim, whom David and the leaders had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim. All of them were designated by name.

a. **I gave them a command... that they should bring us servants for the house of our God:** With this, Ezra sent back to Babylonia for Levites to come and join the work in Jerusalem. He didn't accept the initial failure of Levites to join the group but kept appealing for help.

i. Ezra planned carefully in the Levite recruitment effort. He specifically chose the recruiters - nine **leaders**, and two **men of understanding** to make the appeal as persuasive as possible. Then he

carefully instructed the recruiters as to **what they should say** and directed them who specifically to make the appeal to **(to Iddo and his brethren)**. Indeed, **the good hand of our God** was **upon** the recruitment effort, but it was also upon the *planning* of it.

ii. "*Iddo the chief*; the head of the rest, either by ecclesiastical order or government, which the Persian kings allowed to the Jews; or by some grant or commission from the king." (Poole)

b. **They brought us a man of understanding... namely Sherebiah**: This man responded to the call and led a delegation of Levites.

B. On the journey.

1. (21-23) *A prayer of protection.*

Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God *is* upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath *are* against all those who forsake Him." So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.

a. **I proclaimed a fast... that we might humble ourselves before our God**: Ezra understood the spiritual power of fasting, as a demonstration of our single-minded devotion to God and His cause. Therefore, he called **a fast**, and saw that **He answered our prayer**.

i. As with any spiritual discipline or duty it is possible to fast without the right heart and to trust it as an empty ritual, apart from its true spiritual reality. Real fasting - fasting that is partnered with real repentance and isn't only about image - has great power before God (Mat 17:21).

ii. **To seek from Him the right way:** "Literally 'a straight way' unimpeded by obstacles and dangers." (Yamauchi)

b. **For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort:** Ezra had previously expressed great confidence in the hand of God upon him and his expedition. He did not want to contradict these prior words with later actions, in asking the king for **an escort of soldiers and horsemen**.

i. They needed protection because the danger was real. There was a constant threat of robbers and bandits, especially because they were transporting so many valuables. Yet because of their dependence on God (expressed through prayer and fasting), God protected them.

ii. "The voluntary gifts of the king were welcome. They were expressions of the king's sense of the greatness of his God. These Ezra accepted with gratitude. It would have been quite another matter if he had asked the king to help him do what he had declared God was able to do for him." (Morgan)

iii. "Thus we see that this good man had more anxiety for the glory of God than for his own personal safety." (Clarke)

iv. "There is an added interest in the fact that Nehemiah, in his day, would see the matter quite

differently, accepting a military escort as part of God's bounty (Neh 2:7-9).” (Kidner)

c. **So we fasted:** “They put their holy resolution into execution: purpose without practice is like Rachel, beautiful but barren.” (Trapp)

2. (24-30) *Distribution of articles to be offered among the tribal representatives.*

And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests; Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them; and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes, and all Israel *who were* present, had offered. I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles *weighing* one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold, twenty gold basins *worth* a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold. And I said to them, “*You are* holy to the LORD; the articles *are* holy also; and the silver and the gold *are* a freewill offering to the LORD God of your fathers. Watch and keep *them* until you weigh *them* before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers’ *houses* of Israel in Jerusalem, *in* the chambers of the house of the LORD.” So the priests and the Levites received the silver and the gold and the articles by weight, to bring *them* to Jerusalem to the house of our God.

a. **Weighed out to them:** Ezra divided the valuables among the **leaders of the priests**, making each of them responsible for their portion. They were responsible then to **watch and keep them** until they arrived in Jerusalem and delivered them to the **leaders of the priests and Levites** there.

i. "These are enormous sums, worth millions of dollars." (Yamauchi) The king of Persia sent great treasure to support the ongoing work of the temple.

ii. "If the God of the Jews were no more than a name (he might have argued), the whole exercise was pointless; but if He existed, He would expect tangible courtesies from a king - and the scale of them should reflect the donor's power and majesty." (Kidner)

b. **So the priests and the Levites received the silver and the gold:** This took some measure of faith, because holding this wealth made them targets for violence by robbers or bandits. They received this responsibility and stewardship.

3. (31-32) *Summary of their departure and arrival in Jerusalem.*

Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road. So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days.

a. **And the hand of our God was upon us:** Ezra here repeated what is now a familiar phrase. God's hand was indeed upon them to protect, guide, and bless them.

i. "God never fails those who act in full dependence on Himself, and so in complete independence of all others." (Morgan)

b. **So we came to Jerusalem:** This ended the fourth-month journey from Babylonia to Jerusalem. Ezra - together with the entire group - was now in the Promised Land and in the land promised to their ancestors.

C. Arrival in Jerusalem.

1. (33-34) Precious articles offered to the LORD.

Now on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui, with the number *and* weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time.

a. **The silver and the gold and the articles were weighed:** Those in Jerusalem expected a proper accounting for what had been sent from Babylon. We may say that this was more to *prove* the integrity of the men in Ezra's expedition than to disprove it.

b. **All the weight was written down at that time:** They did it all with a careful accounting, as is fitting for good stewardship and precious things.

i. "According to Babylonian tradition, almost every transaction, including sales and marriages, had to be recorded in writing. Ezra may have had to send back a signed certification of the delivery of the treasures."
(Yamauchi)

2. (35) Sacrificial offerings made to the LORD.

The children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats *as a sin offering*. All *this* was a burnt offering to the LORD.

a. **Offered burnt offerings:** These **burnt offerings** were to propitiate for general sin and to show dedication unto the LORD. The entire animal was burnt as a sacrifice to God.

i. **Twelve bulls for all Israel:** "Though of *tribes* there were only *Judah* and *Benjamin*, yet they offered a bullock for *every tribe*, as if present. There can be little doubt that there were individuals there from all the twelve tribes, possibly some families of each." (Clarke)

ii. "The reason for offering *seventy-seven* lambs is not so obvious, whatever conjectures about the perfect number it may seem to invite." (Kidner)

b. **As a sin offering:** The **sin offering** was made mostly for the idea of purification, especially for specific acts of transgression. Taking both sacrifices together (**burnt** and **sin** offerings), we can see that they addressed both the problem of *sin* (addressing the general sin problem) and *sins* (addressing the problem of specific sins).

3. (36) *The orders from Artaxerxes are related.*

And they delivered the king's orders to the king's satraps and the governors in the region beyond the River. So they gave support to the people and the house of God.

a. **And they delivered the king's orders:** This would especially have been the commands giving special authority to Ezra (Ezr 7:25).

i. **The king's orders:** "Presumably the documents that accredited Ezra as one who was authorized to administer the Jewish law among his fellow-countrymen in the various regions of the province." (Kidner)

b. **So they gave support to the people and the house of God:** This reminds us of the great *purpose* of Ezra's expedition. In the final two chapters we will see Ezra administering strict correction as a reformer; but he did not come primarily as a disciplinarian. He came to

give support to the people and the house of God, and only dealt with the problems of sin and compromise as necessary in the course of this greater goal.

Ezra Prays About Intermarriage

Ezr 9:1 After all this had been done, some of the leaders of the people of Israel came and told me that the people, the priests, and the Levites had not kept themselves separate from the people in the neighboring countries of Ammon, Moab, and Egypt or from the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Amorites. They were doing the same disgusting things which these people did.

Ezr 9:2 Jewish men were marrying foreign women, and so God's holy people had become contaminated. The leaders and officials were the chief offenders.

Ezr 9:3 When I heard this, I tore my clothes in despair, tore my hair and my beard, and sat down crushed with grief.

Ezr 9:4 I sat there grieving until the time for the evening sacrifice to be offered, and people began to gather around me—all those who were frightened because of what the God of Israel had said about the sins of those who had returned from exile.

Ezr 9:5 When the time came for the evening sacrifice, I got up from where I had been grieving, and still wearing my torn clothes, I knelt in prayer and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God.

Ezr 9:6 I said, "O God, I am too ashamed to raise my head in your presence. Our sins pile up higher than our heads; they reach as high as the heavens.

Ezr 9:7 From the days of our ancestors until now, we, your people, have sinned greatly. Because of our sins we, our kings, and our priests have fallen into the hands of foreign kings, and we have been slaughtered, robbed, and carried

away as prisoners. We have been totally disgraced, as we still are today.

Ezr 9:8 Now for a short time, O LORD our God, you have been gracious to us and have let some of us escape from slavery and live in safety in this holy place. You have let us escape from slavery and have given us new life.

Ezr 9:9 We were slaves, but you did not leave us in slavery. You made the emperors of Persia favor us and permit us to go on living and to rebuild your Temple, which was in ruins, and to find safety here in Judah and Jerusalem.

Ezr 9:10 "But now, O God, what can we say after all that has happened? We have again disobeyed the commands

Ezr 9:11 that you gave us through your servants, the prophets. They told us that the land we were going to occupy was an impure land because the people who lived in it filled it from one end to the other with disgusting, filthy actions.

Ezr 9:12 They told us that we were never to intermarry with those people and never to help them prosper or succeed if we wanted to enjoy the land and pass it on to our descendants forever.

Ezr 9:13 Even after everything that has happened to us in punishment for our sins and wrongs, we know that you, our God, have punished us less than we deserve and have allowed us to survive.

Ezr 9:14 Then how can we ignore your commandments again and intermarry with these wicked people? If we do, you will be so angry that you will destroy us completely and let no one survive.

Ezr 9:15 LORD God of Israel, you are just, but you have let us survive. We confess our guilt to you; we have no right to come into your presence."

Ezra 9:1-15

Ezra 9 - Israel's Sin and Ezra's Confession

A. The problem is exposed.

1. (1-2) The leaders report to Ezra.

When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters *as wives* for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of *those* lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass."

a. The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands: After his arrival and the proper accounting of all the gifts brought from Babylonia, Ezra was presented with bad news. The spiritual condition of the post-exile community was bad, and this was evident in their failure to separate from the pagan peoples that still populated the region.

i. "Feeble and isolated, the Jews were quite unable to resist the attacks of their jealous neighbors. Would it not be better to come to terms with them, and from enemies convert them into allies? Then the policy of exclusiveness involved commercial ruin; and men who knew how their brethren in Chaldea were enriching themselves by trade with the heathen were galled by a yoke which held them back from foreign intercourse." (Adeney)

b. **For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons:** Their failure to separate resulted in intermarriage with the surrounding pagan communities.

i. It wasn't that this intermarriage was the *only* problem; but as these communities intermarried, there would be no areas left untouched by pagan associations - business, government, social life. To allow intermarriage with idolaters was to allow all these other areas of compromise.

c. **With respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites:** This shows that the problem was not primarily *ethnic*. The problem was they did not separate themselves from these **abominations**, specifically the idolatry of these people.

i. "All this testified abhorrence, not merely of the act of having taken strange wives, but their having also joined them in their *idolatrous* abominations." (Clarke)

ii. With this forsaking of Jewish identity and the at least partial embrace of idolatry (or its toleration in the Jewish community), in a few generations there would cease to be *any* distinctive Jewish community in the Promised Land.

iii. Ezr 9:1-2 seems to recall passages from the Law of Moses against intermarriage with the surrounding Canaanite tribes - in particular, Exo 34:11-16 and Deu 7:1-4. We may see this conviction of sin on the part of the people and their leaders, and the way that the conviction of sin was phrased, to indicate (spiritually speaking) that Ezra's arrival to bring the ministry of teaching God's word was bearing fruit. The

people heard the word, looked at their lives, and saw that the two did not match.

iv. "During the obscure period that followed the dedication of the temple - a period of which we have no historical remains - the rigorous exclusiveness which had marked the conduct of the returned exiles when they rudely rejected the proposal of their Gentile neighbours to assist them in rebuilding the temple was abandoned, and freedom of intercourse went so far as to permit intermarriage with the descendants of the Canaanites." (Adeney)

d. **Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass:** Worst of all, the **leaders** of the community were leaders (**foremost**) in this sin. They were leaders, but in the wrong direction.

i. "Leading aristocratic families were foremost in contracting the foreign alliances. It is such as they who would profit most, as it is such as they who would be most tempted to consider worldly motives and to forgo the austerity of their fathers." (Adeney)

2. (3) Ezra's complete astonishment.

So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished.

a. **When I heard this thing:** Ezra had just finished a dangerous four-month journey from Babylonia to Jerusalem. He had perhaps over-romanticized the spiritual commitment of the return-from-exile pioneers and had expected to find something completely different than the culture of compromise that he found.

b. **And sat down astonished:** Certainly, one of the reasons for his mourning (expressed in the tearing of the garment and the plucking of the beard) was that Ezra

remembered that it was these sins of idolatry and compromise that caused the tribes of Israel to be exiled before. He no doubt wondered how the people could endanger themselves like this again.

i. **Astonished:** "Means 'to be appalled or stupefied'... rare is the soul who is so shocked at disobedience that he is appalled. (The English word originally meant 'to make pale.')" (Yamauchi).

ii. Both Ezra and Nehemiah were confronted with the sin of pagan intermarriage. Nehemiah responded by plucking out the hair of the guilty (Neh 13:25); Ezra responded by plucking out his own hair.

iii. "It has been truly said that communion with the Lord dries many tears, but it starts many more." (Meyer)

4. (4) *Ezra is joined by others who were also grieved at Israel's sin*

Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

a. **Everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled:** There were those in the community who were also horrified at the sin of their community. These (who were marked by their respect for God's word) **assembled** together with Ezra.

b. **Because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive:** This was an interesting title to give to those who had sinned. In a historical sense they were among the captives who returned from Babylonia (though many or most of them were actually born in Judea). Yet in a real spiritual sense they were

carried away captive by their sin of partnership with idolaters and idolatry.

i. **Sat down astonished:** "Partly for grief and shame at the sin; and partly for fear of some great and dreadful judgment which he expected and feared for it" (Poole).

B. The prayer of Ezra.

1. (5-6) Ezra's sense of shame.

At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God. And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than *our* heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens."

a. **At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting:** Ezra knew there was a time to mourn and he did that for a long time. He also knew that there was a time to pray, and now he would begin his prayer.

i. "The 'evening sacrifice' took place about three p.m. (cf. Exo 12:6; Act 3:1). The informants had probably visited Ezra in the morning, so that he must have sat in this position for many hours. The time of the evening sacrifice was also the appointed time for prayer and confession." (Yamauchi)

ii. As Ezra prayed, he alone prayed - yet because he stood before an assembly of the people of God, there was a sense in which he led them in prayer. "The officiating minister is not merely to pray before the congregation, while the people kneel as silent auditors. His prayer is designed to guide and help their prayers, so that there may be 'common prayer' throughout the whole assembly" (Adeney).

b. Fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God: Ezra was one of many in the Bible who prayed on his **knees**.

i. Solomon prayed on his knees (1Ki 8:54), the Psalmist called us to kneel (Psa 95:6), Daniel prayed on his knees (Dan 6:10), people came to Jesus kneeling (Mat 17:14, Mat 20:20, Mar 1:40), Stephen prayed on his knees (Act 7:60), Peter prayed on his knees (Act 9:40), Paul prayed on his knees (Act 20:36, Eph 3:14), and other early Christians prayed on their knees (Act 21:5). Most importantly, Jesus prayed on His knees (Luk 22:41). The Bible has enough prayer *not* on the knees to show us that it isn't required, but it also has enough prayer *on* the knees to show us that it is good.

ii. Ezra also **spread out his hands to the LORD**. This was the most common posture of prayer in the Old Testament. Many modern people close their eyes, bow their head, and fold their hands as they pray, but the Old Testament tradition was to spread out the hands toward heaven in a gesture of surrender, openness, and ready reception. "With the palms open toward heaven, in a having, craving way, as beggars. This was the Jewish manner of praying, and it was very becoming" (Trapp).

c. I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You: Though Ezra's hands were raised his face was down in shame and humiliation before the LORD. He sensed that the sins of the people of Israel had weighed his head down so much that he could not lift his head (**our iniquities have risen higher than our heads**).

i. **Ashamed and humiliated:** According to Yamauchi, there is a difference in these two ancient Hebrew

words. The first speaks of being **ashamed**; the second of “the pain that accompanies shame.”

ii. “God had been so often provoked, and had so often pardoned them and they had continued to transgress, that he was ashamed to go back again to the throne of grace to ask for mercy in their behalf. This is the genuine feeling of every reawakened *backslider*.” (Clarke)

d. **Our iniquities have risen higher than our heads:** Significantly, Ezra prayed saying “**our iniquities**” instead of “*their* iniquities.” Ezra had just arrived to this community and he had not shared any kind of life or conduct with them. Yet he knew that because they were bound together in the same covenant before God,

their iniquities were in fact his.

2. (7-9) *Ezra remembers God’s past kindness to Israel in spite of their sins.*

“Since the days of our fathers to this day we *have been* very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as *it is* this day. And now for a little while grace has been *shown* from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. For we *were* slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.”

a. **We have been very guilty:** Ezra recognized the generally sinful past of the tribes of Israel, and how their

exile was a righteous work of God against His sinful people.

b. And now for a little while grace has been shown:

Ezra then reflected on the remarkable goodness of God in bringing a **remnant** of His people back from exile and allowing them to live in the Promised Land again.

c. To give us a peg in His holy place: The idea is that Israel once again had a safe position, a standing in God's favor and in His temple. In those days, houses didn't really have cupboards or storage closets as we think of them. Things were stored on *pegs* set up all around the room. If something was on its peg, it was safe and secure, stored properly and ready for use at the appropriate time.

i. Only a few days before this, Ezra had seen the temple for the first time in his life. He was impressed that God had given His people **a peg in His holy place** once again and was therefore afraid that their casual disregard for this blessing would once again stir up the righteous anger of God.

d. And give us a measure of revival in our bondage:

Ezra rejoiced to see even a **measure of revival** and knew that this was an emblem of God's mercy and favor that should not be despised with disobedience and compromise.

e. To revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall: Ezra was impressed by all these signs of God's mercy and favor to His people, signs he had only seen a few days before for the first time. It made him appreciate how good God had been to His people, and how dangerous it was for them to sin and compromise in response to His goodness.

i. "Some critics take this reference to a wall as an argument for the priority of Nehemiah over Ezra, assuming an allusion to the wall the Nehemiah had repaired in his day. But most scholars agree that the reference here is not to be taken literally." (Yamauchi)

ii. **To give us a wall:** "They had the fence of the king of Persia's favour. They had also God's providence, as a hedge or wall of fire round about them." (Trapp)

iii. "The Jewish commentator Slotki (p. 166) observes poignantly: 'A little grace had been granted by God to his people; a small remnant had found its weary way back to its home and driven a single peg into its soil; a solitary ray of light was shining; a faint breath of freedom lightened their slavery. How graphically Ezra epitomizes Jewish experience in these few words!'" (Yamauchi)

3. (10-14) *Ezra fears that God's people are testing His mercy.*

"And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity. Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave *it* as an inheritance to your children forever.' And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities *deserve*, and have given us

such deliverance as this, should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor?"

a. **What shall we say after this?** Ezra offered no excuses and not even an explanation. Their conduct was indefensible and a direct disobedience to what God **commanded by His servants the prophets.**

i. **That you may be strong:** "Although you may fancy that this way of making leagues and marriages with them is the only way to establish and settle you, yet I assure you it will weaken and ruin you and the contrary course will make you stronger." (Poole)

b. **You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve:** As severe as the exile was, Ezra recognized that it was **less than** what the people of God deserved. As he looked at their present disobedience, he understood that it was a way of despising the great mercy God had shown in the past and made them deserve a complete and final judgment.

i. As the tribes of Israel piled sin upon sin before the fall of the northern and southern kingdoms, God still showed remarkable mercy to them. He did not *have to* preserve them in exile; there could have been genocide instead. As well, He did not *have to* bring them back from exile into the Promised Land once again. Each of these was a wonderful example of God's mercy in the midst of judgment.

ii. "It is a fine revelation of the only attitude in which any man can become a mediator. There is first an overwhelming sense of sin. This is accompanied, and perhaps caused by, that deeper sense of the righteousness and grace of God. It finds expression in

agonized and unsparing confession. The passion of the whole movement is evidence of its reality.” (Morgan)

4. (15) *Ezra calls upon the mercy of God.*

“O LORD God of Israel, You *are* righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as *it is* this day. Here we *are* before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!”

a. **O LORD God of Israel:** Here Ezra wisely appealed to the LORD as the **God of Israel**. Though they had been unfaithful to Him, Ezra still hoped for covenant mercies from the LORD because He was their God.

b. **You are righteous:** Ezra also wisely appealed to God’s righteousness, especially in leaving a **remnant** in fulfillment of His prior promises (2Ch 30:6; Isa 10:20-22).

i. “Ezra is far too much in earnest simply to wish to help his people to escape from the consequences of their conduct. This would not be salvation. It would be moral shipwreck. The great need is to be saved from the evil conduct itself.” (Adeney)

c. **Here we are before You in our guilt:** Ezra wisely did not claim an excuse or a reason for their sin. Israel had sinned and they were *guilty*. The appeal must be made for mercy to the guilty, not as a favor to the deserving (or semi-deserving).

i. We note here that Ezra also did not claim special circumstances or did not tell God that their difficult environment made their present compromise understandable, or that all their other good works or faithfulness somehow excused their idolatry. He simply realized that **no one can stand before You because of this!**

ii. "Ezra had not even the heart to plead, as Moses had, that God's name would suffer in such a case. His prayer was naked confession, without excuses, without the pressure of so much as a request."
(Kidner)

The People Confess Their Sin

Ezr 10:1 While Ezra was bowing in prayer in front of the Temple, weeping and confessing these sins, a large group of Israelites—men, women, and children—gathered around him, weeping bitterly.

Ezr 10:2 Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, of the clan of Elam, said to Ezra, "We have broken faith with God by marrying foreign women, but even so there is still hope for Israel.

Ezr 10:3 Now we must make a solemn promise to our God that we will send these women and their children away. We will do what you and the others who honor God's commands advise us to do. We will do what God's Law demands.

Ezr 10:4 It is your responsibility to act. We are behind you, so go ahead and get it done."

Ezr 10:5 So Ezra began by making the leaders of the priests, of the Levites, and of the rest of the people take an oath that they would do what Shecaniah had proposed.

Ezr 10:6 Then he went from in front of the Temple into the living quarters of Jehohanan son of Eliashib, and spent the night there grieving over the unfaithfulness of the exiles. He did not eat or drink anything.

Ezr 10:7 A message was sent throughout Jerusalem and Judah that all those who had returned from exile were to meet in Jerusalem

Ezr 10:8 by order of the leaders of the people. If any failed to come within three days, all their property would be confiscated, and they would lose their right to be members of the community.

Ezr 10:9 Within the three days, on the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the men living in the territory of Judah and Benjamin came to Jerusalem and assembled in the Temple square. It was raining hard, and because of the weather and the importance of the meeting everyone was trembling.

Ezr 10:10 Ezra the priest stood up and spoke to them. He said, "You have been faithless and have brought guilt on Israel by marrying foreign women.

Ezr 10:11 Now then, confess your sins to the LORD, the God of your ancestors, and do what pleases him. Separate yourselves from the foreigners living in our land and get rid of your foreign wives."

Ezr 10:12 The people shouted in answer, "We will do whatever you say."

Ezr 10:13 But they added, "The crowd is too big, and it's raining hard. We can't stand here in the open like this. This isn't something that can be done in one or two days, because so many of us are involved in this sin.

Ezr 10:14 Let our officials stay in Jerusalem and take charge of the matter. Then let anyone who has a foreign wife come at a set time, together with the leaders and the judges of his city. In this way God's anger over this situation will be turned away."

Ezr 10:15 No one was opposed to the plan except Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah, who had the support of Meshullam and of Shabbethai, a Levite.

Ezr 10:16 The returned exiles accepted the plan, so Ezra the priest appointed men from among the heads of the clans and recorded their names. On the first day of the tenth month they began their investigation,

Ezr 10:17 and within the next three months they investigated all the cases of men with foreign wives.

Those Guilty of Inter-marriage

Ezr 10:18 This is the list of the men who had foreign wives: *Priests*, listed by clans: Clan of Joshua and his brothers, sons of Jehozadak: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah.

Ezr 10:19 They promised to divorce their wives, and they offered a ram as a sacrifice for their sins.

Ezr 10:20 Clan of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah

Ezr 10:21 Clan of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uzziah

Ezr 10:22 Clan of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasa

Ezr 10:23 *Levites*: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (also called Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer

Ezr 10:24 *Musicians*: Eliashib *Temple guards*: Shallum, Telem, and Uri

Ezr 10:25 *Others*: Clan of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah, and Benaiah

Ezr 10:26 Clan of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah

Ezr 10:27 Clan of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza

Ezr 10:28 Clan of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai

Ezr 10:29 Clan of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth

Ezr 10:30 Clan of Pahath Moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh

Ezr 10:31 (31-32) Clan of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah

Ezr 10:33 Clan of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei

Ezr 10:34 (34-37) Clan of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi, Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,

Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu

Ezr 10:38 (38-42) Clan of Binnui: Shimei, Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph

Ezr 10:43 Clan of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah

Ezr 10:44 All these men had foreign wives. They divorced them and sent them and their children away.

Ezra 10:1-44

Ezra 10 - Confession and Repentance

A. The people decide to forsake their sin.

1. (1) The example of Ezra's confession.

Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly.

a. **While Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing:** The power of Ezra's confession was not merely in the words recorded in Ezr 9:6-15. It was in the *depth of heart* that brought forth the prayer, here evidence by **weeping, and bowing down before the house of God**. He prayed this prayer and humbled himself on behalf of the people *publicly*, before **a very large assembly of men, women, and children**.

i. **Bowing down before the house of God:** The Hebrew grammar "implies that Ezra kept on 'throwing himself down' on the ground." (Yamauchi)

b. **For the people wept very bitterly:** This shows that the people were also struck by the conviction of sin and

the need to confess and repent. They sorrowed over the sin of the covenant community just as Ezra had done.

i. "They could not wash their hands in innocency, they, therefore, washed them in tears; they knew that as the sins of the old world, so of this little world, needeth a deluge." (Trapp)

ii. Through the centuries, one mark of a powerful movement of the Holy Spirit among the people of God is that they are convicted of their sin and feel compelled to confess it and to put it away. The old Puritan John Trapp thought of confession as a purging of sin. "This is the soul's vomit, which is the hardest kind of physic [medicine], but healthsomet. This the devil knows... and, therefore, he holds the lips close, that the heart may not disburden itself by so wholesome evacuation" (Trapp).

iii. "Confession of sins is a neglected doctrine. It only comes into its rightful place in times of revival, when the Holy Spirit comes in doubly-convicting power and makes it impossible for the erring believer to have any peace of mind until the wrong is confessed whenever necessary." (J. Edwin Orr)

iv. In his book *The Second Evangelical Awakening*, Dr. J. Edwin Orr quoted the observations of a high-ranking army officer upon the work of the Spirit in his Scottish town: "Those of you who are ease have little conception of how terrifying a sight it is when the Holy Spirit is pleased to open a man's eyes to see the real state of heart... Men who were thought to be, and who thought themselves to be good, religious people... have been led to search into the foundation upon which they were resting, and have found all rotten, that they were self-satisfied, resting on their own goodness, and not upon Christ. Many turned

from open sin to lives of holiness, some weeping for joy for sins forgiven.”

v. William Newton Blair, the author of a book describing the great Korean revival, declares: *“We may have our theories of the desirability or undesirability of public confession of sin. I have had mine, but I know that when the Spirit of God falls upon guilty souls, there will be confession, and no power on earth can stop it.”*

vi. The Bible has much to say about the confession of sin, and we can surmise some general guidelines about the confession of sin:

- Confession should be made to the one sinned against.
- Confession publicly of specific sins should be made as far as the circle of those sins.
- Confession of general spiritual need, while being discrete about the specific sin, is appropriate when the circle of the sin is either personal or very small.
- Confession should be appropriately specific.
- Confession should be thorough.

2. (2-4) *Shechaniah exhorts the people to action.*

And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, *one* of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, “We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise, for *this* matter *is* your

responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it."

a. **We have trespassed against our God... yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this:** Shechaniah recognized the severity of their sin; yet he also knew that their present brokenness over their sin was an emblem of the work of God's Spirit among them. Thus, it was reason for **hope in Israel in spite of this**.

i. It is interesting that Ezra himself did not suggest the course of action that Schechaniah did. Perhaps Ezra was so deeply troubled by the sin of the community that he could not think of a wise response. Perhaps Ezra knew what to do but knew that the suggestion had to come from the community itself instead of from himself, who was a newcomer to Jerusalem and Judea.

b. **Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives:** Shechaniah advised the *actions* of repentance, more than simply indulging the feelings of brokenness.

i. "One fact to be borne in mind about the issue as a whole is that divorce was permitted in Israel (Deu 24:1); and broken marriages had been rife at this time for the very opposite of the present reason: *i.e.*, there had been a scandalous number of Jewish wives abandoned in favour of heathen women (Mal 2:10-16)." (Kidner)

ii. "While divorce is always hateful to God (Mal 2:16), and a witness to human 'hardness of heart' (Mar 10:5), the situation described in Ezra 9, 10 was a classic example of one in which the lesser of two evils had to be chosen. If a serious reason for divorce could ever exist, this had a better claim than most to come within that category." (Kidner)

iii. "Marriages made between some prohibited persons; as suppose, between a father and his daughter, a brother and a sister, are not only unlawful, but void marriages, and *ipso facto* null, by the political laws of civil nations. And therefore these marriages with idolatrous and heathen women, being expressly and severely forbidden by God, might well be disannulled." (Poole)

c. **Those who have been born to them:** This was a strong command, because not only would the wives be put away - but also the *children*. Because of this, some commentators (such as Adeney) think that this was excessive zeal in reforming, going beyond God's will and causing great harm. Yet we should see that this was in fact God's will.

i. This was understood by the ancient culture - that of course, the women would stay with their children. "All these women and their children' reflects the fact that in ancient societies, as in ours, mothers were given custody of their children when marriages were dissolved." (Yamauchi)

ii. It was also, no doubt, mitigated by support from the husbands. "Though by the Jewish laws such marriages were *null* and *void*, yet as the *women* they had taken did not know these laws, their case was deplorable. However, we may take it for granted that each of them received a portion according to the circumstances of their husbands, and that they and their children were not turned away desolate, but had such a provision as their necessities required. *Humanity* must have dictated this, and no law of God is contrary to humanity." (Clarke)

iii. Also, it seems that because of God's mercy in this difficult situation, there were relatively few children

affected (Ezr 10:44).

iv. "Children may and sometimes do suffer, at least temporal evils, for their parents' sins, or upon occasion of them, is most evident, both by the Scripture instances, and by the laws and usages of nations in some cases." (Poole)

d. **Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you:** Shechaniah both exhorted those guilty to do what was right and stood beside them in support. This was especially meaningful because it seems that though Shechaniah was not guilty of marrying a pagan woman, both his father and his uncles were (Ezr 10:21).

3. (5-8) *Ezra issues a proclamation.*

Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath. Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and *when* he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity. And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity, that they must gather at Jerusalem, and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity.

a. **Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath:** The counsel of Shechaniah seemed good to Ezra, so he immediately called upon the people to **swear an oath to do according to this word**. Significantly, Ezra *began*

with the leaders; he expected them to make things right with God first.

b. He ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned: For Ezra, this whole tragedy was as bad as if someone had died. He could not think of himself or his own needs when he knew God was being so greatly dishonored.

i. We can say that Ezra observed a *complete* fast, abstaining from both food and water. This same kind of fast is rare in the Bible but was observed twice by Moses (Exo 34:28; Deu 9:18) and also by the people of Nineveh (Jon 3:7).

ii. "The man who sets himself 'to seek, to do, to teach' the law of God invariably brings himself into places where sorrow will be his portion, and intrepid courage necessary." (Morgan)

c. Whoever would not come within three days... all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly: Ezra was given great civil authority by King Artaxerxes (Ezr 7:26). Here he put that authority to use by making the people fulfill the oath they had previously made (Ezr 10:5).

B. The spirit of repentance at the assembly of the people.

1. (9-11) Ezra's appeal to the trembling assembly.

So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of *this* matter and because of heavy rain. Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives,

adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives."

a. So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days: This was a remarkable response to the remarkable call Ezra made in the preceding verses. Their unified response was another evidence of the moving of the Holy Spirit among the people of God.

b. All the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain: The willingness of people to forsake normal comforts and to humbly assemble in adverse circumstances was another evidence of the moving of the Holy Spirit among them.

i. This response has been seen again as the Holy Spirit has moved upon the people of God. In March of 1859, at the beginning of a great move of God that would bring more than one million souls to conversion in Great Britain, some unordained men with a passion for revival preached at the First Presbyterian Church in Ahoghill, Northern Ireland. There was such a large crowd at that meeting that they had to dismiss the meeting out of fear that the balconies would collapse under the weight of so many people. They took the meeting to the street right outside the church, and in the freezing rain James McQuilkin preached to 3,000 people in the streets, with many of the listeners falling to their knees in the wet and muddy street because they were so moved by the conviction of sin under the preaching of these laymen.

c. You have transgressed... adding to the guilt of Israel: Ezra's word to the people was clear and strong.

Though the moving of the Holy Spirit was evident, it was important to carry the work through to completion and to not be satisfied with a partial work.

d. Now therefore, make confession to the LORD... do His will... separate yourselves: This was a clear call to both *confession* and *repentance*.

i. We might even say that their *confession* would be vain without corresponding *repentance*. This repentance (the decision to stop one's sinful behavior and to **do His will**) is an essential element of the Christian life.

ii. "Perhaps you have the notion that repentance is a thing that happens at the commencement of the spiritual life, and has to be got through as one undergoes a certain operation, and there is an end of it. If so, you are greatly mistaken; repentance lives as long as faith. Towards faith I might almost call it a Siamese twin. We shall need to believe and to repent as long as ever we live." (Spurgeon)

2. (12-15) *The response of the assembly.*

Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, "Yes! As you have said, so we must do. But *there are many people; it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter. Please, let the leaders of our entire assembly stand; and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter.*" Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support.

a. **Yes! As you have said, so we must do:** This was still another evidence of the remarkable moving of the Holy Spirit upon the people. They immediately answered (and **with a loud voice**) in agreement to what Ezra said.

b. **But there are many people... nor is this the work of one or two days:** The people asked Ezra for the *time* to make it right. This was necessary because so many people were involved in this sin; yet the principle was agreed upon with very little opposition.

c. **Only Jonathan the son of Asahel:** "Why these four men opposed the measure is unclear. Perhaps they were protecting themselves or their relatives. Perhaps they viewed the measures of separation as too harsh. Less probably they were fanatics who wished no delay in implementing the measure" (Yamauchi).

3. (16-17) *Each case is examined individually over a 3-month period*

Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain heads of the fathers' households, were set apart by the fathers' households, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. By the first day of the first month they finished *questioning* all the men who had taken pagan wives.

a. **They sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter:** Though Ezra was wisely willing to accept the delay because of necessity, he also held the assembly accountable to do what they agreed to do in the months after the great assembly.

b. **They finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives:** The whole process took many

weeks, because so many men had **taken pagan wives**. The **questioning** was necessary because they needed to examine if one of these wives had genuinely decided to serve the Lord God and to forsake her native religions.

i. If the pagan wife had decided to keep her primary allegiance with her former people and their idols, she could not live among the covenant community and had to be divorced.

ii. To the end of the chapter, there is a list showing that only about 114 of these **pagan wives** refused to embrace the God of Israel and had to be divorced. Yamauchi calculates that it was less than one-half of one percent of the people who were guilty of this pagan intermarriage and who had to divorce their wives. Though it was such a small percentage, it still had to be dealt with strongly - and it was. It also shows that most of the foreign wives joined the people of God in their heart as well as their home.

iii. In the New Testament believers are also instructed to marry within the faith. Marriages to unbelievers are condemned (2Co 6:14) and widows (as one example of the unmarried) are directly commanded to marry within the faith (1Co 7:39). However, Paul specifically commanded that if a believer is married to an unbeliever, they are to remain in the marriage if at all possible, both for the possibility of a witness to the unbelieving spouse and for the benefit it brings to the children (1Co 7:12-17).

4. (18-44) The list of those found guilty.

And among the sons of the priests who had taken pagan wives the following were found of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives;

and *being* guilty, they presented a ram of the flock as their trespass offering. Also of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah; of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah; of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah. Also of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (the same *is* Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. Also of the singers: Eliashib; and of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri. And others of Israel: of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Jeziah, Malchiah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah, and Benaiah; of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Eliah; of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza; of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, *and* Athlai; of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, *and* Ramoth; of the sons of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh; *of* the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Malluch, *and* Shemariah; of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, *and* Shimei; of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluh, Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasai, Bani, Binnui, Shimei, Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, Shallum, Amariah, *and* Joseph; of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, *and* Benaiah. All these had taken pagan wives, and *some* of them had wives *by whom* they had children.

a. And among the sons of the priests who had taken pagan wives the following were found: Those who had to put away their wives (because they refused

to convert) are here listed. This is a somewhat shameful list, and not a very good way to get one's name recorded in the best selling book of all time.

i. "None was exempt from the reformation, which was carried out with complete thoroughness. Such action is ever the true outcome, and only satisfactory expression, of sorrow over sin." (Morgan)

ii. Jewish rabbis speculated on the reason why Jewish men divorced their Jewish wives and married women from the pagan cultures (Mal 2:10-16): because the Jewish women who returned from exile lost their beauty and aged before their time. "When the Jews drew near from the Exile, the faces of the Jewish women had become blackened by the sun. They therefore left them and married heathen wives" (Rabbi Johanan, cited by Yamauchi).

iii. **They presented a ram of the flock:** "This shows that they sinned against knowledge; for a sin of ignorance the oblation was not a ram, but a goat" (Trapp).

iv. **Some of them had wives by whom they had children:** "Whereby he implies that most of their wives were barren; which came to pass by God's special providence, partly to manifest his displeasure against such matches, and partly that the practice of this great and necessary duty might to be encumbered with too many difficulties" (Poole).

b. **All these had taken pagan wives:** As seen before, the greater problem was that these wives *remained* pagan and refused to join the covenant community. Their break with the people of Israel was grounded in *faith*, not in *race*.

i. "Let us at least separate ourselves after the manner of Christ, who frequented the temple, acknowledged the State, accepted invitations to great houses; but his heart and speech always revolved about his Father." (Meyer)

ii. Ezra here disappears from the Biblical record for about thirteen years, when he appears again in the Book of Nehemiah. His passion then was the same as it was at the end of the Book of Ezra: to transform the people of God by bringing them the Word of God.